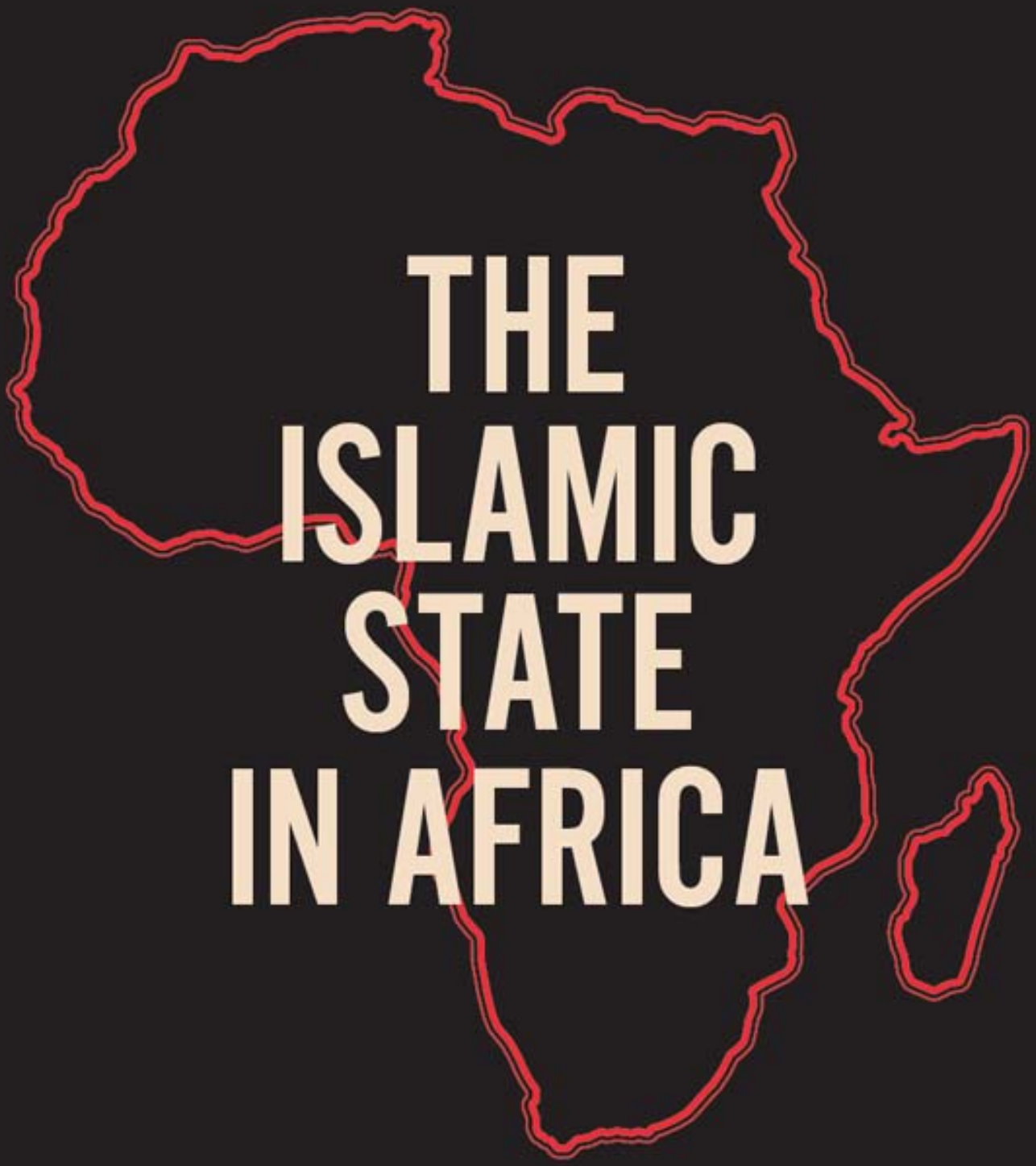
JASON WARNER
WITH
RYAN O'FARRELL, HÉNI NSAIBIA, AND RYAN CUMMINGS



THE ISLAMIC STATE IN AFRICA

THE EMERGENCE, EVOLUTION, AND FUTURE OF THE NEXT JIHADIST BATTLEFRONT

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GLOSSARY

abaya	a modest, loose-fitting, robe-like dress
Al-Naba	an Arabic-language periodical distributed by the Islamic State
Al-Furqan	a primarily Arabic production house for the Islamic State's most important propaganda releases of video or audio messages, including statements from central leadership
Al-Hayat	a primarily English-language media wing of the Islamic State that produced videos, as well as the magazines *Dabiq* and, later, *Rumiyah*; it has not produced media since 2017
almajiri	a boy who is sent to live and study Islam under a teacher
ansar	supporter or defender
bayah	religiously binding oath of allegiance
boko	refers, in Kanuri (a local language of northeastern Nigeria), to things that are "Western"
burqa	full-body veil for women
caliph	the leader of a polity ruled by Islamic law
Dabiq	an online magazine published by the Islamic State between July 2014 and July 2016, intended to aid its radicalization and recruitment efforts
Daesh	Arabic acronym for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; used as a pejorative name for the Islamic State

dawa	the call to join in Islam
emir	literally, prince, but, in jihadi terminology, it refers to a group's commander or leader
fatwa	a non-binding legal decree on matters of Islamic jurisprudence
hadith	sayings and deeds of the Prophet Mohammed
haram	forbidden
hijab	woman's traditional veil
Hisbah	organization within the Islamic hierarchy responsible for implementing a traditional Islamic lifestyle; in the infrastructure of the Islamic State, the *Hisbah* is a sort of morality police
hudud	criminal punishment (for example, for taking Allah's name in vain)
imam	Islamic worship leader (akin to a preacher) who also may provide religious guidance and even advice regarding personal and worldly matters
jihad	to struggle
jilbaab	type of Islamic dress for women that covers the entire body, though leaving the face exposed
Jund al-Khilafa	literally, soldiers of the Caliphate, a term that IS Central uses to refer to those people undertaking violence in its name
kafir	unbeliever or infidel
katibat	battalion
kunya	nickname
mahram	a female's male relative such as a father or brother
majlis al-shura	literally, a consultative council, in which, in practice, a group's senior members normally participate
mufti	a Muslim legal expert who is empowered to give rulings on religious matters
muhajirun	migrants

mujahideen	Islamic, jihadi fighters
munafiqeen	hypocrites
nashid	religiously sanctioned vocal music
niqab	type of Islamic dress for women that covers the entire body, leaving only the eyes exposed
Ramadan	Islamic holy month of fasting
Rumiyah	magazine of the Islamic State, published between September 2016 and September 2017, produced in many languages, replacing *Dabiq*
`Salafism	a conservative reform movement within Sunni Islam, advocating a return to the traditions of the first three generations of pious Muslims
sharia	Islamic law
takbeer	literally *Allāhu akbar*, meaning, "Allah is the greatest"
takfir	the declaration by one Muslim (or group of Muslims) that another Muslim (or group of Muslims) is insufficiently pious, and thus an apostate or infidel, and so warrants excommunication
umma	the global Islamic community
wali	governor (of a province)
wilaya	generally, a province or administrative unit (in this book, it typically refers to an official province of the Islamic State); *wilayat* (plural)
yusufiya	slang term for followers of [Mohammed] Yusuf, the first leader of Boko Haram
zakat	Islamic tax

1

INTRODUCTION

After a nearly four-year, multinational campaign to fight the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also ISIS/ISIL), on December 19, 2018, the president of the United States, Donald Trump, via Twitter, made a bold proclamation: "We have defeated ISIS in Syria, my only reason for being there during the Trump Presidency."[1] Later that same day, the message was issued again as the US president posted a video declaring that "we have won against ISIS."[2] Also on the same day, the US president ordered the withdrawal of some 2,000 American troops from Syria,[3] a decision that would ultimately lead to the resignation of both the US Secretary of Defense, Gen. (Ret.) James Mattis,[4] and the US Special Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, Brett McGurk,[5] in protest. Despite the president's rhetoric of triumphalism, many worldwide, including some in his inner circle, remained skeptical about claims of victory. No such wholesale defeat of the Islamic State (IS) had actually yet occurred, they warned.[6]

Specious as they were, these initial claims about the apparent fall of the Islamic State gained some degree of credence by March 23, 2019. On that date, after months of fighting—under attack by suicide bombers, drone-dropped bombs, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs)—the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS finally liberated the last remaining tract of the

Islamic State's one-time caliphate: a one-and-a-half-mile stretch of land on the Syrian side of the Euphrates River, centered on a town called Baghouz.[7] With that defeat, a second round of optimism emerged among certain observers who declared that the Islamic State had been defeated once again.[8] As with similar proclamations, while many onlookers remained skeptical that the Islamic State had been defeated entirely, many agreed that, at the very least, the loss of Baghouz marked a serious—if not fatal—setback for the caliphate.[9]

For the Islamic State, already landless and battered in Iraq and Syria, its fortunes would decline even further months later. On October 26, 2019, global news networks hailed the announcement that its leader, or *caliph*, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was dead, having detonated a suicide vest when confronted by American military forces in a tunnel in the town of Barisha in northwestern Syria.[10] The death of its ideologue and commander seemingly served as a profound blow to the Islamic State's already declining fortunes.[11] A third round of doomsday predictions for the IS again began to circulate. While few observers went so far as to suggest that the IS threat was completely destroyed, many[12]—though not all[13]—did continue to at least acknowledge that things were looking ever bleaker for its diminished leadership, now in hiding in Iraq, which had once been its core territory.[14]

Yet, for its part, the Islamic State's attitude in public after al-Baghdadi's death was far from defeatist. On October 31, 2019—just days after al-Baghdadi's death—through an audio recording released via the Telegram app, the Islamic State admonished: "Do not be happy America, for the death of Sheikh al-Baghdadi," continuing later: "Don't you see America, that the Islamic State is now on the threshold of Europe and Central Africa?"[15]

* * *

The Islamic State's Presence in Africa

These IS Central claims of penetration into Central Africa by October 2019 were neither haphazardly offered nor mere hollow hyperbole. Since the Islamic State's declaration of its caliphate in June 2014, across the African continent the transnational jihadi organization had quietly but swiftly built a network of numerous official provinces, official non-province affiliate

groups, and unofficial supporters who conducted attacks, undertook varying degrees of territorial control and governance, and publicized many of their activities, all in the Islamic State's name. Following an initial series of pledges of allegiance, or *bayat*, in 2014 from militants in Libya, Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia, enthusiasm for the IS Central remained palpable in 2015, with more pledges of allegiance coming from militants in the Lake Chad Basin, and the Sahara. By 2016, a core of militants in Somalia had pledged allegiance, and, by spring 2019, so too had militants in both Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo. As allegiance to the Islamic State grew, so did the personnel size and scope of its affiliated groups' activities on the African continent. Beginning as early as 2017, some observers began suggesting that "Africa is the new battleground for ISIS"[16] and that the "fight against the Islamic State is moving to Africa."[17] Analysts around the world began to proffer group-, country-, and region-level analyses about the future of the Islamic State on the continent.[18] Around the same time, other observers began to question if parts of Africa could serve as the Islamic State's new "fallback."[19] The growing prominence of the IS presence in Africa was also becoming increasingly apparent: by mid-2018, the Islamic State enjoyed the collective loyalty of an estimated six thousand fighters on the African continent.[20] As IS fighter numbers grew, so too did the violence of groups acting in its name. By mid-2019, IS fighters in Africa were responsible for the deaths of more than twelve thousand people, according to the United Nations.[21] By the end of 2019, in just that year alone, the IS-affiliated Nashir News Agency claimed that IS militants had conducted some 415 attacks across 13 of the 54 states on the African continent.[22] Thus, on the eve of al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019, the Islamic State boasted four official provinces (one each in Libya, Algeria, Egypt, and Somalia) plus two double-"winged" provinces, one in West Africa (encompassing the IS West Africa Province and its wing, the IS West Africa Province–Greater Sahara), and one in Central Africa (the IS Central Africa Province–Democratic Republic of Congo and the IS Central Africa Province–Mozambique).

And yet, after IS Central's battering during its *annus horribilis* of 2019—the loss of Baghouz in March and the death of al-Baghdadi in October—its growing network of African provinces and non-province affiliates would presumably and justifiably have had a waning interest in being connected

with an on-the-run and on-the-decline parent group. In reality this was not the case: for all the misfortunes that the IS Central suffered in its 2019, the effects of the parent group's precipitous decline seemed to have scarcely registered among its official provinces and official non-province affiliate groups in Africa. In the aftermath of its first significant loss, the fall of its territorial caliphate with the capture of Baghouz in March 2019, its affiliate provinces across the African continent each re-pledged allegiance to the Islamic State as part of a video series called "And the Best Outcome Is for the Righteous."[23] Rather than showing any signs of weakening loyalty, post-March 2019 the Islamic State's provinces in West Africa and Sinai increased the tempo of their attacks undertaken in the name of the IS Central, while in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique, IS media releases began claiming attacks by its soldiers beginning in April[24] and June,[25] respectively, under the name of its new, sixth *wilaya*, or province, in Central Africa.

While the loss of Baghouz in March 2019 did not diminish the apparent en-thusiasm for the IS Central of its African affiliates, neither did the death of its *caliph*, al-Baghdadi, in October 2019. Within a week of his death, nearly every one of its official African affiliate provinces had released a video statement reaffirming their allegiance to the IS Central and the group's new *caliph*, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi.[26] Individually, its affiliate provinces continued their attacks under the IS Central's name, with three of the African provinces—in West Africa, Somalia, and Sinai—even claiming their attacks as revenge for the death of al-Baghdadi.[27] As one commentator from Al Jazeera warned in November 2019, with the death of al-Baghdadi "ISIL is not dead, it just moved to Africa."[28]

* * *

Argument and Methodology

Lacking both the land and leadership that had once served as markers of its both revered and reviled brand, the IS Central might have been expected to continue to suffer a decline in 2019, with its satellite provinces, including in Africa, likely losing enthusiasm for its project. As we have shown, however, this was not the case. Thus, at the core of this book, we ask the

following: how did the Islamic State's African official provinces and non-province affiliate groups emerge and evolve, and why have these affiliates continued to show loyalty and strength—by re-pledging allegiance, continuing to conduct and publicize attacks in the Islamic State name, and developing new branches—even as the IS Central itself was in seeming decline following its *annus horribilis* of 2019?

Overview of Organization of Chapters and Key Claims

To answer these two distinct but interrelated questions—on trends of emergence and evolution of IS groups, on the one hand, and on rationales for their continued loyalty to a declining parent group, on the other—each chapter of this book takes as its focus one of nine IS organizations on the African continent, offering an in-depth investigation of the "life cycle" of each between its emergence and al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019. These groups treated are the Libya Province (chapter 2), Algeria Province (chapter 3), Sinai Province (chapter 4), Tunisia group (chapter 5), West Africa Province (chapter 6), West Africa Province–Greater Sahara (chapter 7), Somalia (chapter 8), and Central Africa Province–DRC (chapter 9) and Central Africa Province–Mozambique (chapter 10).

To give analytical consistency and clarity to the book as a whole, each chapter is divided into three time periods: the pre-*bayah* period (pre-June 2014, when IS declared its caliphate); the *bayah* period (between June 2014 and the time when the African group in question pledged *bayah*); and the post-*bayah* period (between the time when each group's *bayah* was accepted or acknowledged and that of al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019). The decision to divide the chapters into these three periods stems from the theological importance of *bayah* as a binding connection between subordinate affiliate organizations and the leader of the Islamic State. Using this as a marker for periods in the life cycles of groups offers structural uniformity in presenting and analyzing the highly variable relationships between the Islamic State's central leadership and all its affiliate organizations in Africa, while also serving as a transferable historical heuristic across the chapters.

Within each of these three temporal "life cycle" periods of African IS affiliate groups, and in all the chapters, we ask and seek to answer distinct questions. In the first, pre-*bayah* period, the main question is: considered in terms of local, on-the-ground dynamics, what made the IS Central, as a

global entity, begin to look appealing to local African militant groups or individuals before they pledged *bayah*? In the second, *bayah* section, we ask: once a local African militant group deemed affiliation with the Islamic State an attractive option, what did the process of becoming a formal IS African province look like in practice? In the third, post-*bayah* period, we ask: upon receiving formal provincial or non-province affiliate status, how did these IS affiliate organizations evolve and, importantly, to what extent did their relationships with IS Central inform their evolution and activities?

As we argue in the book, the life cycle experiences of IS groups in Africa can be usefully captured through three new analytical lenses. Though we describe these terms, their meanings, and their applications more fully later, for now it bears stating that, in the pre-*bayah* period, the global emergence of the Islamic State served to facilitate what we call "the democratization of jihad" on the African continent, offering current or aspirant jihadist groups or leaders a new global pole of ideological and material power to which they might turn to establish or further their goals. Pledging allegiance thus became viewed as a new avenue for personal or group advancement. We next argue that in the *bayah* period, once African militant groups decided to seek to become formal provinces of the IS, all groups were forced to undergo a process of "affiliate utility validation." Pledging groups had to prove their usefulness to the IS Central, with utility being a dynamic metric for the IS Central, which proved malleable over time. Finally, in the post-*bayah* period, as concerns the nature of impact that a formal IS provincial status gave to local groups, we suggest that the Islamic State's African provinces should be thought of as existing as "sovereign subordinates," or entities that, while ostensibly subordinate to the IS Central, generally received little direct or tangible material or operational benefit from their parent group; instead, they operated mostly autonomously, being informed more by their local politics and dynamics than directed or assisted from above. By aligning these new terms as organizing lenses around each of these temporal periods in the life cycle of IS groups in Africa, we find them to be useful as common organizing heuristics while also flexible enough to shed light on idiosyncrasies in the trajectories of individual affiliates.

Collectively, this series of observations about the life cycles of African IS groups—their rise through the "democratization of jihad"; their need to prove value through "affiliate utility validation"; and their existence as

"sovereign subordinates"—helps to answer the overarching question of the book: why, if the IS Central appeared to be in decline, did African provinces retain allegiance and why did new provinces join? In sum, we argue that this somewhat counterintuitive phenomenon can be explained as follows: The Islamic State's global rise served to democratize local jihadist insurgencies' opportunities for global affiliation, extending the benefits of a new transnational jihadist identity to local would-be commanders who had previously been affiliated with or sympathetic to al-Qaeda, or who held no such global affiliation at all. Once African groups decided to pledge allegiance, the Islamic State's process of validating the utility of potential local affiliates proved to be achievable and flexible, offering aspirant leaders and groups a new pole of power—at least ideologically—to which to affiliate. Given these affiliates' evolution into sovereign subordinates—whereby nominally subordinate organizations, in practice, retained significant operational autonomy—the decline of IS Central had limited practical impact on the trajectories of its African affiliates, which continued to reap many of the same benefits of affiliation as they did when IS Central was at its height: benefits continued to come to African affiliates mostly through branding, and not through material transfers. Indeed, rather than renouncing the Islamic State, African affiliates are likely to remain committed to the parent group to which they had bound themselves by *bayah*, and do so into the future, as their trajectories have been governed, and will likely continue to be governed, far more by local conditions than by IS Central's own circumstances.

Methodology

In constructing detailed histories of each of the nine IS affiliates (composed of official "provinces" and official non-province "affiliate" groups), this book is, at its core, multidisciplinary and methodologically mixed. In terms of disciplines, it draws on theories, analytical frameworks, and scholarship emanating from political science, history, African studies, religious studies, and terrorism, security, and conflict studies. Methodologically, it is composed of a series of comparative historical case studies that retrace IS African affiliates' emergence and evolution through al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019. These histories were themselves created through the conduct and analysis of both primary and secondary source research, predominantly qualitative though occasionally quantitative. As concerns quantitative work,

we have gathered descriptive statistics concerning various aspects of affiliate groups, including estimates of the number of fighters and numbers, frequency, and targets of attacks. However, our analysis primarily relies on qualitative methods, which have long been prioritized by social scientists interested in constructing rich descriptions to generate in-depth understandings of specific cases. And, while ultimately an academic work, this volume also seeks to strike a difficult balance: a work of high academic rigor that is also accessible—and, we hope, engaging—for specialists and non-specialists alike.

In terms of sources, this book relies on both primary and secondary source material. As for primary source material, central to much of our research are the videos, audio recordings, documents, pictorial reports, and magazine articles produced and distributed by the Islamic State and its affiliates on social media. These materials consist of tallies of its affiliate organizations' reported attacks, pictures and videos of those attacks, and, less frequently, pictures and videos of the punitive and administrative activities undertaken by local African IS affiliates. These media products are typically produced by local affiliates and then transmitted to and distributed by the IS Central's media arm, Diwan al-I'lam. This media wing releases statements, photosets, videos, and audiotapes primarily through its network of "Nashir" channels on the Telegram messaging service, which itself offers a centralized and standardized means for local IS affiliates from across the world to announce their claimed attacks and to distribute locally recorded media products. While there are inherent limitations to relying on what are explicitly propaganda products, the audio recordings and video footage produced by local affiliates and released by the Islamic State's centralized media apparatus remain some of the most revelatory, consistent, and, indeed, important sources through which to understand the functional links between these groups and the central organization to which they are nominally subordinate. To be sure, such releases by the Islamic State must be treated with due caution. Nevertheless, they offer insight into how the Islamic State wishes itself and its affiliates to be perceived by supporters and the outside world, and thus provide a window into the Islamic State's own self-image as a global movement. In addition to these official releases of the IS Central, we also analyzed media released by local IS affiliates themselves, as well as media released by supporters and sympathizers outside the Islamic State's official channels, both of which provide

additional and often less-tailored windows into how the Islamic State's base perceives itself outside the carefully curated productions of IS's centralized media teams.

In addition, we conducted primary source interviews with ninety-four persons who had some exposure to or expertise about the Islamic State's presence in Africa. Among them, we talked to defectors from various IS organizations across Africa, as well as one man who had been held captive by the Islamic State. Elsewhere, we interviewed citizens who had been confronted by members of the Islamic State, who had been witness to violence of the Islamic State, and whose friends and family had become victims of IS violence. In interviews with the former members of IS groups, or victims of the groups, we do not disclose real names and identifying details. In some instances, interviewees had already gone public with their experiences with the Islamic State, and in those cases we used real names. Beyond members of civil society living in IS-affected places, we interviewed governmental and counterterrorism officials based locally and internationally who seek to minimize the presence of these groups. In certain cases, we received assistance in approaching these interviewees through local contacts or journalists. Interview style varied by respondent: the authors interviewed some respondents directly, via telephone or via email, while in a small number of cases, trusted proxies interviewed respondents and provided the authors with transcripts.

In addition, we conducted interviews with, presented our findings to, and solicited critiques from dozens of subject matter experts—academics, researchers, analysts, government officials, and journalists—around the world. In attempting to study what is an inherently opaque, secretive, and complex phenomenon, this book is a product of the extreme generosity of networks of colleagues whose input, assistance with sourcing, and offers of critiques and corrections have allowed this book to be what it is. While many of the interviews with these subject matter experts are cited, in other cases their analysis was used as background information and so does not appear in citations.

This book, in large part, relies on secondary source literature derived from other subject matter experts' studies of questions of interest. Particularly important in helping to address a topic that is so wide-ranging —topically, geographically, and temporally—this book cites findings from reports on IS groups in Africa written by governmental, intergovernmental,

and non-governmental international organizations. Among the governmental organizations are the Congressional Research Service (CRS), the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point, and the African Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS), while intergovernmental organizations' reports include those from the United Nations. Yet most widely cited are reports from non-governmental organizations, including Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International, the International Crisis Group (ICG), the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP), Global Initiative for Civil Stabilization, the Washington Institute, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), the Hiraal Institute, the Armed Conflict and Location Event Data Project (ACLED), the Brookings Institution, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), Jamestown Foundation, the Long War Journal, and George Washington University's Program on Extremism (POE). Though the academic study of the Islamic State in Africa remains at an incipient stage in more formalized academic realms, this book also draws on research published in books or in peer-reviewed academic journals.

Beyond secondary sources, this book draws insights from news reports and radio broadcasts from around the world. Linguistically, it has relied on local and international media published in at least ten different languages: English, French, Portuguese, Arabic, Italian, Somali, Hausa, Fulfulde, Tamasheq, and Dawsahak. In addition to products of formal media houses, this book cites social media posts—from Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram—from members of IS groups in Africa, members of the IS Central, analysts of the Islamic State and relevant local conflicts, and, as the opening of this chapter shows, prominent figures, including heads of state, from around the world.

Finally, why did we focus on nine groups? Indeed, though many individuals and groups of individuals have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, not all are investigated here; nor is our only inclusion criterion that a group must have become an official IS province (see, for example, Tunisia in chapter 5). To be included as an African "affiliate" of the Islamic State, a group needed to demonstrate: (a) internal hierarchy and cohesion to the degree that it could theoretically manage leadership succession; (b) the will and capacity to sustain armed attacks on civilian or government targets; and (c) evidence of a durable relationship with the IS Central. Single individuals or small cells of individuals that undertook attacks in the name of the

Islamic State were not included here because they were not part of larger, more institutionalized groups, could not sustain violent attacks against military or civilian targets, or, in many cases, did not have enduring relationships with IS Central. Thus, while attacks inspired by the Islamic State have occurred in Morocco, Kenya, South Africa and elsewhere, and pledges of allegiance to the Islamic State have come from around the continent (for instance, Tanzania), these perpetrators of violence have rarely, if ever, managed to build durable organizations with consistent ties to IS Central. Instead, as we were interested in the life cycles of those organizations that became provinces or durable non-province affiliates, we did not give attention to various smaller cells of IS sympathizers or individuals that did not ultimately emerge as viable entities in themselves.

Notes on Terminology

For the purposes of this book, we refer to all IS organizations based in Africa that met the above-mentioned standards as "affiliates." The term "affiliates" is intended to be a catch-all to denote the diversity in organizational and relational structures that exists among African affiliates of the Islamic State. The first of these "affiliate" entities are official IS "provinces" (or *wilayat*), which are groups that have pledged allegiance, and on which the IS Central has conferred the official status of *wilaya*. These are the majority of our cases, and we include discussions of Islamic State *wilayat* in Libya (chapter 2), Algeria (chapter 3), Sinai (chapter 4), and Somalia (chapter 8).

In some cases, operationally independent insurgent entities became "wings" of an official province, as in the case of the Western African (ISWAP) and Central African (ISCAP) provinces, reflecting a broader process of affiliate consolidation by IS Central in 2018 and 2019. When they exist as "wings," these groups are not stand-alone provincial entities but constituent parts of singular provinces; IS media releases utilize the same provincial label for two operationally distinct but administratively bound insurgencies. For the purposes of this book, we discuss these "wings" of ISWAP and ISCAP in separate chapters: the original IS–West Africa Province (chapter 6) and ISWAP–Greater Sahara (chapter 7), and ISCAP–Democratic Republic of Congo (chapter 9) and ISCAP–Mozambique (chapter 10). We make this choice to capture and analyze the practical nuances of local insurgencies' affiliation with the Islamic State.

The second of these entities, which we refer to as "non-province affiliates," are organizations which, despite having pledged allegiance to IS Central and having had their pledge acknowledged, have never had official "province" status conferred on them. The most prominent entity discussed in this regard is Tunisia (chapter 5), which, despite being active, has never achieved full *wilaya* status. Of note, some entities that have eventually achieved *wilaya* status—namely ISWAP–Greater Sahara (chapter 7) and Somalia (chapter 8)—spent years of their life cycles as non-province affiliates.

Apart from these official provinces and non-province affiliates, we also occasionally discuss other IS-aligned entities, which exist simply as loosely affiliated "networks" or "cells" of the Islamic State, as they do not meet at least one of our three inclusion criteria.[29] These "networks," "cells," or "affiliate groups" stand in contrast to a fourth entity, the IS Central, which is the Islamic State's core leadership, based in Iraq and Syria.

Finally, we note that this book ends its analysis in October 2019, the date of al-Baghdadi's death. While we do not believe that his death necessarily changed much about the evolution of the groups on the African continent—indeed, we have written elsewhere that many of these groups have actually strengthened since that date[30]—we found this an appropriate choice for ending the book.

Caveats

While it is important to note what we have sought to achieve in this book, it is also important to note the constraints of this work. For one, because of limited space, we necessarily had to curtail certain discussions that might have been prioritized by other authors writing a similar book. Thus, while we attempted to help the reader understand the ground-level social, political, and economic conditions that led African militant groups to decide to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State (notably in the pre-*bayah* period), our analysis could often not extend to in-depth discussion as to why *those* militant groups themselves arose. As our focus is instead on the rationales, processes, and impacts of becoming an African IS affiliate, we spent less time discussing the prehistory—related to ethnic cleavages, regime type, and social exclusion, for instance—of the origins of the pledging groups themselves.

Second, given the nature of the topic under consideration—the internal rationales of and subsequent impacts on violent, clandestine African jihadist groups affiliating with another violent, clandestine global jihadist parent group—our analyses are inherently limited by the availability of information. While we have worked assiduously over more than three years to find the best, most insightful sources available, we remind readers that by their very nature, the groups that we are analyzing have vested interests in secrecy. With the inability to extensively review internal documents of groups or to interview members themselves, our analyses are based on external observation that relies on analyzing the best information available. As time evolves, new documents internal to the groups that we discuss may be declassified, new vocal members may emerge, or new revelations may come about that add to—or challenge—our findings. Thus, our findings here represent what we believe are the most rigorous analyses to date, even though they are inherently limited by the desire for the groups about which we write to maintain a high degree of secrecy and are subject to new interpretations as time evolves.

Third, we seek to address our collective positionality vis-à-vis the subjects about which we write. The four writers come from varied backgrounds in terms of citizenship—one South African, one Tunisian–Swede, and two Americans—and professional orientation—with the authors hailing from academia, government, the private sector, and research institutions—and we recognize that our approaches to studying and discussing the topics at hand are informed by our own particular experiences and opinions. Self-critically, we have sought to minimize the extent to which our own personal backgrounds and outlooks may have influenced our analysis of these phenomena. Thus, we welcome scholars from around the continent and beyond (whose open positionality vis-à-vis these subjects may be different from our own) to read, challenge, and refine our work with their own interpretations.

What the Islamic State Central Offered

To understand how and why African jihadi groups reacted to the declaration of the Islamic State's caliphate on June 29, 2014, and subsequently pledged their loyalty to it, it is first important to understand what the Islamic State represented to the global Salafi-jihadi movement more broadly.

The first iteration to the Islamic State, originally known as Jama'at al Tawhid wal-Jihad (TwJ, or the Assembly of Monotheism and Jihad), was founded in 1999 by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi,[31] a petty criminal and street thug from Zarqa, Jordan. After spending time in Afghanistan and Pakistan, al-Zarqawi returned to Jordan before being arrested in 1992 after attempting to form a jihadi group, Jund al-Sham.[32] While imprisoned in Jordan, al-Zarqawi became increasingly radicalized under the tutelage of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, a Jordanian Salafist intellectual, with whom al-Zarqawi was incarcerated.[33] When al-Zarqawi was released from prison in 1999, he traveled back to Afghanistan, where he met Osama bin Laden and secured funding to establish a new jihadi group. Following the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003, al-Zarqawi's group, the TwJ, was one of many in Iraq fighting against the infidel invaders from the West.[34] Al-Zarqawi's group officially announced its presence in Iraq in 2004.[35]

While deeply connected to al-Qaeda's international network, al-Zarqawi and his group did not pledge allegiance to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda Core until October 2004.[36] In exchange, al-Zarqawi sought al-Qaeda's recognition of his group, the TwJ, as the official al-Qaeda branch in Iraq. Although Bin Laden—who had known of al-Zarqawi prior to his pledge—had historically viewed al-Zarqawi's sectarian, anti-Shia stances as misguided, al-Qaeda Core's need to maintain an anti-American relevance with a presence in Iraq meant that he overlooked these ideological misalignments in order to co-opt al-Zarqawi and the TwJ.[37] Ultimately, Bin Laden accepted the pledge.

With his pledge accepted, al-Zarqawi changed his group's name to "al-Qaeda in the Land of Two Rivers," unofficially known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI),[38] but more accurately referred to as al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia.[39] Under al-Zarqawi's leadership, AQI became a deadly force in Iraq, leveling attacks against institutions of the Iraqi state, and targeting Iraq's Shia Muslim populations in a bid to deepen the sectarian divide in the country, which he viewed as beneficial in fostering a sectarian conflict that would drive Sunni Iraqis into the arms of the Sunni insurgency.

Al-Zarqawi's leadership of AQI was not to last. On June 7, 2006, he was killed by a US airstrike, after which Abu Ayyub al-Masri took over as leader of AQI.[40] Under al-Zarqawi, AQI had joined with five other Sunni militias to form the Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC), though al-Zarqawi's

AQI was the most prominent, active, and decisive member group. After al-Zarqawi's death, his successor, al-Masri, assumed leadership of the MSC, and on October 15, 2006, the MSC was declared the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI).[41] Under the leadership of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi—not to be confused with the group's eventual leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi—and with al-Masri as minister of war, ISI held as its stated goal the creation of an "Islamic State" in Iraq's predominantly Sunni Arab western and northwestern provinces.[42] Claiming dominion over Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Ninewa, and parts of Babil and Wasat provinces, ISI began to establish its own state-like bureaucracies, an administrative ambition that would become the hallmark of the Islamic State's claims to worldly governance.

The creation of the ISI further highlighted the schisms between al-Qaeda Core and its affiliate. At least one source of tension related to the fact that the transmutation from AQI to ISI was undertaken without consulting Bin Laden first, which led al-Qaeda Core's leadership to debate internally how to handle the change. Eventually, however, al-Qaeda Core endorsed the creation of the ISI.[43] At its head was Omar al-Baghdadi, who affirmed by late 2007 what was already effectively the case, that AQI was no more: it was "officially dissolved in favor of the Islamic State."[44] Al-Qaeda Core, represented by al-Zawahiri as Bin Laden's more public deputy, agreed, noting: "There is nothing in Iraq today called Al-Qaeda. Rather the group Al-Qaeda in Iraq has merged with other jihadi groups into the Islamic State of Iraq."[45] Thus, this process of evolution had seen al-Zarqawi's network of terrorist cells evolve into a highly bureaucratized, institutionalized, and capable local fighting force, deeply embedded in Iraq's local conflict, able to leverage impressive resources and yet remain operationally independent from the transnational network to which it owed nominal allegiance.

Despite ISI's ability to monopolize much of Iraq's Sunni insurgency, by 2008 it was under serious pressure. Already by late 2006, large segments of Iraq's Sunni population were openly hostile towards the ISI's presence and its attempts to govern them. This discontent against ISI culminated in the Sunni "awakening" of late 2006, which saw Sunni tribes and the "Sons of Iraq" ally with the United States against AQI and its allies. With the initiation of the US "surge" in Iraq in 2007,[46] ISI suffered heavy personnel and territorial losses, involving the attrition of many senior leaders, regular

soldiers, foreign fighters, and the weapons capabilities it once had.[47] By late 2008, the ISI seemed on the verge of collapse.[48]

But by 2010 the ISI saw its fortunes begin to rise with the American with-drawal and the appointment of its most infamous leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,[49] which occurred after al-Masri and Omar al-Baghdadi were killed by a joint US–Iraqi operation on April 19, 2010.[50] A preacher at a mosque in Samarra with a PhD in Islamic studies at the time of the US invasion,[51] al-Baghdadi had helped found one of the five other Sunni jihadist groups that joined Zarqawi's AQI to form the MSC and, later, ISI, becoming the "general supervisor of the sharia committees for the *wilayat* (provinces) within the new 'state' as well as a member of ISI's senior consultative council."[52]

After ISI's defeats and the American withdrawal, al-Baghdadi set to work to rebuild the battered ISI with much of its senior leadership drawn from the Ba'ath-era Iraqi military. By working to free former ISI soldiers from jail during its "Breaking the Walls" campaign between 2012 and 2013,[53] ISI claimed some 19,000 military operations between November 2011 and May 2014 in Iraq alone.[54] This represented a sharp escalation in ISI's insurgency, not only targeting the Iraqi state and civilians, but also dismantling much of the Sunni counterinsurgency forces that had been built up during the "awakening" and the "surge," which had so critically weakened the group.

While this active build-up of the group from within was important, a pivotal moment for the ISI would come from outside the group, with the start of the Syrian uprising and civil war in March 2011. As protests around that country emerged against long-time strongman President Bashar al-Assad, al-Baghdadi sent ISI operatives to fight the al-Assad regime alongside the Syrian opposition forces, with the goal of establishing a presence inside Syria. Led by Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, these former ISI cells would become Jabhat al-Nusra (JaN), or Front of the Supporters. Jabhat al-Nusra embedded itself within the anti-al-Assad opposition, fighting alongside others and gradually establishing itself as a credible and capable insurgent group in the fractious opposition milieu.[55]

With Jabhat al-Nusra's profile rising within Syria, al-Baghdadi attempted to unilaterally reimpose ISI's authority on its Syrian offshoot. On April 9, 2013, al-Baghdadi declared that the ISI had reabsorbed JaN to form

a new group that spanned both countries, under the name of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), more popularly known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).[56] However, Jabhat al-Nusra rejected Baghdadi's declaration of ISI dominion over JaN.[57] Al-Qaeda Core's al-Zawahiri agreed, elevating Jabhat al-Nusra as al-Qaeda's official affiliate in Syria in a May 2013 letter, while limiting ISI's jurisdiction to Iraq.[58] Al-Baghdadi, having lost faith in al-Jolani and not having waited for al-Zawahiri's approval, had sent more loyal personnel to build a direct ISI presence in northern Syria as early as late 2012, and began conducting *dawa*, or proselytization, efforts in spring 2013.[59] The newly declared ISIS/ISIL would subsequently ignore al-Zawahiri's May 2013 directive, and began to operate more openly as yet another jihadist group within rebel-held territories through summer 2013.

Though al-Qaeda Core still claimed authority over ISIS/ISIL, the tense relationship between the world's foremost jihadi network, al-Qaeda, and its wayward affiliate only worsened. Through the summer and fall of 2013, the relations between ISIS/ISIL and the wide variety of Syrian rebel units with which it coexisted began to deteriorate as ISIS/ISIL seized towns in rebel-held Syria and imposed its own puritanical form of administration.[60] Escalating tensions over ISIS/ISIL's repeated attacks on rebel groups and civilian opposition bodies throughout fall 2013 finally erupted into large-scale fighting between ISIS/ISIL and moderate Syrian opposition coalitions in January 2014. While the rebel offensive against ISIS/ISIL succeeded in pushing it out of much of northwestern Syria, ISIS/ISIL succeeded in securing control of Raqqa, Syria, and of Fallujah, Iraq, in January 2014.[61]

The bloody fighting between ISIS/ISIL and various Syrian rebel groups finally proved too much for al-Zawahiri. In a statement posted on jihadi internet forums in February 2014, al-Qaeda Core denounced the group,[62] and ridiculed ISIS/ISIL's claims of being a "state."[63] Al-Zawahiri accused ISIS/ISIL of "sedition" and the "shedding of protected blood," disavowing any responsibility for the group's actions.[64] Nonetheless, ISIS/ISIL continued to rapidly expand its areas of control in both Iraq and Syria. By June 2014, it had captured and secured control of 70 percent of Iraq's Anbar province,[65] as well as major urban centers like Tikrit and Mosul, the third-largest city in Iraq.[66]

But the most important date for ISIS/ISIL would be June 29, 2014. In a pre-recorded audiotape, the group's spokesman, Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, officially declared the resurrection of the caliphate, with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as the new caliph of what was now called, simply, "the Islamic State" (IS).[67] Al-Baghdadi demanded the loyalty of Muslims everywhere on the pretext that the "legality of all emirates, groups, states, and organizations becomes null by the expansion of the caliph's authority and [the] arrival of its troops to their areas,"[68] thus illustrating the Islamic State's ambitions of supremacy over the global jihadist movement.

Just one week later, the deed would be complete. On July 4, 2014, at the Great al-Nuri Mosque in Mosul, Iraq, al-Baghdadi announced himself in a carefully choreographed speech as the caliph of the Islamic State.[69] In doing so, he proclaimed himself the leader of the world's one and a half billion Muslims, in addition to promising to do away with all political borders, as his kingdom expanded its reach across the world. In his speech, which occurred during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, al-Baghdadi predicted that the moment would arise when "the Muslim will walk everywhere as a master," with the Islamic State "conquer[ing] Rome and seiz[ing] the earth."[70]

* * *

At its core, the Islamic State began with a commitment to institute sharia law in communities throughout Iraq and Syria, for the purpose of casting off earthly oppression and creating a more pious community in which global Muslims, collectively constituting the *ummah*, could live. In its quest to do so, it created a deadly hybrid, combining an extremist reading of Islamic theology with the violent capabilities of an army and the technocratic know-how of bureaucratic state-building.

The creation of the Islamic State—and its idealized global Islamic polity—would require a radical restructuring of the systems of authority, power, and geopolitical organization in which the Islamic State found itself enmeshed in the second decade of the early 21st century. To create the global caliphate, al-Baghdadi and his group needed to destroy (or, at minimum, remake)[71] all existing structures of contemporary governance. The internationally recognized system of Westphalian states—with their

borders, armies, flags, currency, anthems, and especially their secular, national legitimacy—was the incarnation of what the Islamic State viewed as the failures of modern life, especially in Islamic societies. These states, led by men heretically elected by voters, not ordained by God, were inherently illegitimate, even when their rulers were Muslims. National, city, town, and even village governments, and all the trappings that went with them, necessarily had to be remade to create and expand the sharia-governed homeland for the *ummah*. This new global polity was to be built, as Barak Mendelsohn has described, "on the ruins of Muslim nation-states."[72]

As part of the Islamic State's quest to create the caliphate, it made clear that it viewed itself as justified in using violence to bring under its control the world's Muslim communities. Under its rule, violence was permissible in defending its rise against any external, non-Muslim entities (like foreign invaders, Christians, and Jews) and against Muslim entities (like national governments, Shias, and Sufis) that might wish to do it harm.[73] Rapidly, the Islamic State's emergence came to be marked by unparalleled brutality, or what one group of scholars has referred to as its "ultra-violence."[74]

For many around the world, the first sign of the brutality of the Islamic State occurred on August 19, 2014, when the American journalist James Foley was beheaded by the group in its erstwhile capital of Raqqa. The beheading was captured in a video which was soon circulated online. In response to the Foley video, the US Secretary of State, John Kerry, proclaimed: "There is evil in this world. [The Islamic State] is ugly, savage, inexplicable, nihilistic, valueless evil."[75] As the world began to take note of the group—which rapidly grew to control territory the size of Great Britain by September 2014[76]—it demonstrated its violent hostility towards regional regimes which it viewed as tools of the "far enemy" by releasing a video on February 2, 2015, of a 26-year-old Jordanian pilot, Moaz al-Kasasbeh, captured after his F-16 plane crashed in Raqqa, being burned alive by the group.[77]

From mid-2014 onward, the Islamic State became infamous for its highly choreographed propaganda films, which often included shocking "ultra-violence" intended to terrorize, intimidate, and silence its critics. Aside from beheadings and live burnings, the Islamic State produced videos showing members of their insurgency bringing accused apostates into

fields, and, in front of watching crowds, stoning them to death on suspicion of adultery.[78] It became common in IS propaganda videos to have accused dissidents or spies dig their own graves before members of the Islamic State shot and beheaded them.[79] Violence documented in the Islamic State's media included using children as young as three or four as executioners,[80] hanging captured "spies" upside down on meat racks and slitting their throats,[81] lowering a cage of accused enemy spies into water to drown,[82] trapping accused "moles" in a car and shooting them with a rocket-propelled grenade, strapping a backpack full of explosives to an enemy spy and forcing him to run before remote-detonating the pack,[83] sending children of IS members into a maze to find and execute tied-up prisoners,[84] and enslaving women and children of ethnic minorities, particularly the Yazidi community in Iraq, of which, by 2015, the United Nations estimated the Islamic State held some 3,500 slaves,[85] as part of its broader campaign of ethnic cleansing to rid Iraq of non-Muslim minorities.[86]

The Islamic State paired its gruesome punishments with the pursuit of its territorial ambitions. Though its caliphate had been announced in June 2014 with its conquest of Mosul, it continued to expand its territory in both Syria and Iraq. Under the slogan "*baqiya wa tatamadad*" (remaining and expanding)[87]—the Islamic State controlled by late 2014 much of eastern and northern Syria (including Raqqa) and western and northwestern Iraq (including Mosul, Tikrit, and Fallujah). By early 2015, it expanded its holdings further to include Palmyra in Syria and Ramadi in Iraq.[88] At its pinnacle, the Islamic State ruled over an estimated 7.7 million people in Iraq and Syria, and attracted some 40,000 foreign fighters from 120 countries.[89]

And, indeed, the Islamic State—in rejecting the internationally recognized states that composed the Muslim world—sought to attract Muslims from around the world with its promises of a more pure and authentic life under the authority of *sharia*. Its territory in conflict-ridden Iraq and Syria was advertised not only as a place to fight and die with valor but also as a beacon of hope for Muslims and their families the world over. Propaganda produced by one of the Islamic State's media arms, Amaq, depicted its caliphate as a utopia for pious Muslims of the 21st century.[90] By both co-opting pre-existing bureaucracies and constructing its own, it

broadcast its ability to provide security, healthcare, access to food and water, and clean communities. For children living in the Islamic State's territory,[91] there was schooling, albeit based on its own puritanical Salafist curriculum. It paved roads and cleaned streets.[92] It ran its own department of motor vehicles. It collected taxes, and issued birth certificates[93] and passports.[94]

These trappings of an actual, functional Islamic state, rarely demonstrated by jihadist insurgencies, were made possible by the Islamic State's ample finances. Here it had no rival: it was unquestionably the richest terrorist group in history. Relying on a combination of profits from oil sales, taxation of the population under its control,[95] looting of banks, extortion, kidnapping and the sale of slaves,[96] ransom-taking, antiquities sales, and possibly drug trafficking,[97] at its height the Islamic State's coffers held some US$6 billion in 2015, equal, as Colin Clarke notes, to the GDP of Liechtenstein.[98] Powerful, inspirational, brutal, and wealthy, the Islamic State's brand and all that it represented, whether true or not, captivated the hearts and minds of populations around the world, including some on the African continent.

The Contours of the Argument

The following chapters discuss how and why various upstart IS groups reacted to what the Islamic State offered. They detail the emergence and evolution of nine IS affiliates around the African continent and seek to explain their abiding fealty to a core parent group that, by late 2019, was quite clearly in decline.

Transnational affiliation for local jihadist insurgencies had existed since the expansion of al-Qaeda Core in the early 2000s. The global Salafi-jihadist movement, which emerged in the late 1970s with the intertwined forces of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian Revolution,[99] had, since its inception, emphasized the internationalism of its adherents and, in most cases, the rejection of the existing nation-state order. While this transnationalist outlook had long facilitated the movement of activists and foreign fighters across the world to participate in dozens of conflicts, al-Qaeda's decision in 2002 to formally establish recognized affiliates outside its leadership's base areas in Afghanistan and Pakistan signaled an

important shift within the global Salafi-jihadist movement. This decision was followed by spectacular terrorist attacks against Western or Allied targets, and simultaneously the attempt to build a global network of local sympathetic insurgent organizations. It was this model that the Islamic State —itself once one of al-Qaeda's affiliated global satellite branches—sought to emulate as it called for the allegiance of local insurgencies from across the globe.

In recounting the process of IS franchising and the trajectories of these IS African affiliates, we divide the history of each affiliate organization into three periods: the pre-*bayah* period (or the period prior to the group's pledging of *bayah* to the IS Central after the declaration of the caliphate in June 2014); the *bayah* period (the period between when groups pledged *bayah* and when it was acknowledged or accepted by IS Central); and the post-*bayah* period (the period between when each group's *bayah* was accepted or acknowledged and when al-Baghdadi die in October 2019).[100] We ask particular questions about each period and, in offering answers to them, have created new lenses of analysis to understand the experiences of each of the nine affiliate organizations' evolution and decision-making process.

The Pre-Bayah Period, the Democratization of Jihad, and Logics of Attraction to the Islamic State Central

In the pre-*bayah* period, what made the IS Central, as a global entity, appealing to local African militant groups or individuals? We argue that for all the African IS affiliates, the Islamic State's rise served to "democratize jihad" on the continent, offering aspirant leaders and groups new forms of power which they believed they could exploit through formal affiliation.

By the "democratization of jihad" we are referring to the impact that the Islamic State's June 2014 declaration of the caliphate had on the global jihadist movement. This served to create new opportunities for local insurgencies to seek and adopt transnational affiliations over which al-Qaeda had historically held a general monopoly. The Islamic State's rise, in other words, created a bipolar global jihadist order, allowing aspirant African militant groups and leaders a new or alternative pole of power to which to affiliate themselves. This new pole proved attractive not only to those already affiliated or sympathetic to al-Qaeda, but also to those leaders

and groups which had never previously been affiliated to any transnational identity. More precisely, by "democratization of jihad," we are referring not to increasing democracy or equality in group-based decision-making processes but to the expansion of choice in affiliation to a global parent group by local actors.

Prior to the Islamic State's declaration of its global caliphate, aspirational jihadist groups seeking a global brand could only really look to al-Qaeda, which monopolized the concept of transnational affiliation within the global Salafi-jihadi movement.[101] As we show, would-be affiliates recognized the openings that were made available by the Islamic State's emergence and sought to exploit them for personal, group, ideological, religious, and material purposes.[102] Yet these new nodes of allegiance did not come without discord: the announcement of the Islamic State's global caliphate resulted in what Djallil Lounnas has described as "deep divisions between those who chose to remain loyal to Al-Qaeda and those who decided to join the IS," and ultimately led to "major rifts and splits within [al-Qaeda-affiliated] organizations." Eventually, the Islamic State would join al-Qaeda in serving as one of the two preeminent global Salafi-jihadist "alliance hubs," as Tricia Bacon has called them.[103]

What, in general terms, was attractive to an African militant group about pledging allegiance to a new global jihadist network like the Islamic State? Though the evidence remains for now limited, we can assume that the anticipated benefits were both material and reputational in nature.[104] On the material side of the ledger, pledging African groups likely anticipated that an affiliation with the IS Central could bring financial, personnel, arms and knowledge transfers. For instance, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi sought to merge his group, TwJ, with al-Qaeda at least in part with the aim of accessing al-Qaeda Core's financial reserves.[105] On the reputational side, would-be Islamic State groups likely viewed an affiliation with IS Central as conferring upon them varying types of legitimacy: theological legitimacy (in their alignment with IS Central's worldview) and global legitimacy (in their alignment with the international IS brand). This reputational legitimacy, they likely reasoned, could provide second-order material effects, in that such global legitimacy could bring in new local or international recruits, local funding, and the like, even if these material benefits did not come from IS Central itself.[106] Other rationales were also

possibly at play. Aisha Ahmed has argued that a local group's affiliation with a global jihadi brand can help it recruit across ethnic and tribal lines, as its ideology becomes more universalized, subsequently helping in maintaining internal group cohesion.[107] In discussing the Algeria-based GSPC's decision to rebrand itself as an al-Qaeda affiliate, Dario Cristiani has suggested that this boosted the GSPC's appeal, increasing its local and international legitimacy, and thereby reversing the declines that it had experienced in the years before.[108] Indeed, for Morten Bøas and Kevin Dunn, this tendency for local groups to seek to acquire global jihadi brands has become a foundational strategic choice for legitimacy in the current world of African conflict.[109]

In her foundational study of the logics of international terrorism alliances, Tricia Bacon has offered what is perhaps the most useful discussion of when and why would-be affiliates pledge allegiance to a parent group or, as she calls it, "alliance hub." Rather than presenting explanations rooted in mere alignment of ideology, Bacon argues that terrorist alliances

> can provide a way [for a pledging group] to repair organizational deficiencies, like a lack of knowledge, skills, or resource mobilization capability under the prevailing conditions. When a group recognizes its misalignment with the environment and cannot address the problems on its own, it may search for allies to address them … Groups experience learning and adaptation needs during periods of significant change, such as when they are young, when they are recovering from a crisis [such as leadership loss], or the environment is changing swiftly or in unanticipated ways.[110]

Indeed, this conceptualization of groups seeking alliances when they are faced with internal challenges that they could not or sought not to overcome internally often fits the case of African groups pledging allegiance to the Islamic State.

To the extent that IS's entrance served to "democratize" jihad in Africa, it bears asking: just what did al-Qaeda's presence on the African continent look like prior to IS's emergence? Al-Qaeda's first roots in Africa were to be found in Sudan, where its leader, Osama bin Laden, lived from 1991 to 1996, and where al-Qaeda sent instructors and trained local adherents.[111]

Having inherited a substantial sum of money from his family in Saudi Arabia—and finding a permissive environment in Sudan under Hassan al-Turabi's and Omar al-Bashir's regimes—Bin Laden came to that country and established an investment firm.[112] This, al-Hajira, involved itself in construction and farming, and, as his associates would later reveal, was a front for Bin Laden to finance and manage al-Qaeda.[113] Though Sudan would expel Bin Laden and his associates in 1996 under US pressure, both he and al-Qaeda would leave their mark on the African continent, infamously orchestrating the dual bombings of US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in August 1998, killing more than 200, in an attack that Stig Hansen calls "the most successful attack in Al-Qaeda's pre-9/11 history."[114]

Following the expulsion of Bin Laden and al-Qaeda from Sudan in 1996—which significantly weakened the organization, depriving it of substantial revenue and, according to Sudanese intelligence, forcing him to become a full-time militant—he and the leadership relocated to a new safe haven in Afghanistan under the protection of the ruling Taliban. After the bombing of the USS *Cole* in October 2000, al-Qaeda's attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in the United States in September 2001 set the global jihadi group on a new path. While the invasion of Afghanistan in the wake of the 9/11 attacks weakened al-Qaeda in the near term by deposing the Taliban,[115] which had offered shelter to the group, the invasion also led it to undertake an organizational shift, away from being a terrorist network finding refuge under sympathetic Islamist regimes towards one that sought to construct a network of locally rooted insurgencies united by a common global affiliation.

To that end, two years after the 9/11 attacks—and more than a decade after its emergence in 1988—al-Qaeda began to announce the creation of affiliate branches around the world. Beginning with in-house franchise in Saudi Arabia (with al-Qaeda's core leadership deploying members back to Bin Laden's home country to set up a terrorist network in 2002),[116] al-Qaeda's new model of local affiliates then expanded to granting membership to existing insurgent groups founded by local leaders, rather than those that were already part of the organization. These branches would include the announcement of al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2004,[117] Yemen in 2009, Syria in 2013, and the Indian subcontinent in 2014.[118] On the African

continent, al-Qaeda would develop two primary franchises. In 2006, it accepted the membership of an extant Algerian insurgent group, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which by 2007, began to operate under the new name of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), based primarily in Algeria and the wider Sahel; and in 2012, it announced that al-Shabaab, which never took on an "al-Qaeda" title, was the group's branch in Somalia. In other instances, al-Qaeda found various degrees of sympathy from groups in Libya and Egypt,[119] and in Nigeria leaders of Boko Haram were in talks with al-Qaeda. However, in none of these places—Libya, Egypt, or Nigeria—did al-Qaeda ever establish an official branch.[120] Thus we can see that African jihadi groups had been pledging allegiance to a global jihadi organization, al-Qaeda, long before the emergence of the Islamic State.[121]

Just why was the African landscape so ripe for the emergence of al-Qaeda affiliates and sympathizers and, later, those of the Islamic State? Though particular conditions are discussed more fully in the chapters, we note here that the places where both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State found sympathizers have tended to be in Muslim-majority African countries, which have often suffered from full or partial state collapse, undemocratic politics, and persistent political and economic corruption. Moreover, generally—though again, not exclusively—the particular communities in which both al-Qaeda and IS sympathizers or allied adherents have emerged have often been economically disadvantaged and politically marginalized within the broader society, often with opportunities for employment, schooling, and security absent or unstable.

Thus, as we describe in subsequent chapters, when IS Central emerged globally, it served to open up the space for these would-be affiliates to find affiliation with an alternative pole of global jihadi power to that of al-Qaeda, which had previously been the only option. The arrival of this alternative node of global jihadi power, we show, became useful for leaders of al-Qaeda and non-al-Qaeda jihadi groups, dissident members within these groups, and entrepreneurial individual jihadis alike, all of whom exploited or were empowered by this fissure within the global jihadist movement and the "democratization" of opportunity for jihadist affiliation that it represented.

The Bayah Period, Affiliate Utility Validation, and The Process of Becoming Official Affiliates

Once a local African militant group deemed potential affiliation with the Islamic State attractive, what did the process of becoming a formal IS African province look like in practice? Across all the IS organizations that would eventually emerge, we show that after pledging allegiance, each was forced to undergo a waiting period of "affiliate utility validation," in which IS Central vetted would-be affiliates for their potential usefulness to its cause.

Following their initial pledge of allegiance, would-be affiliates needed to prove their value to IS Central. Here, we emphasize two points. First, the criteria IS Central used to determine what made pledging groups acceptable or "useful" new provinces changed over time. Second, this liminal period between pledging and acceptance—when elevation to provincial status occurred for groups—also varied significantly between groups: while some were granted almost immediate "official" provincial status, others needed to wait years to become full provinces. In yet other cases, elevation to a full, independent *wilaya* never occurred, and at other times they simply became "wings" of new provinces.

When the Islamic State's spokesman al-Adnani called for Muslims around the world to pledge *bayah* to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in June 2014, Salafi-jihadist militants and organizations answered that call with enthusiasm. From Libya[122] to Sri Lanka,[123] the Caucasus,[124] Somalia,[125] Nigeria,[126] Yemen,[127] the Philippines,[128] the Sahara,[129] Saudi Arabia,[130] the Democratic Republic of Congo,[131] Tunisia,[132] Bangladesh,[133] and Algeria,[134] jihadi groups from around the planet sought to join the Islamic State. Rapidly, the Middle Eastern insurgency found itself with acolytes from every corner of the globe, making up nearly thirty-eight provinces in all.[135]

But, just what did pledging allegiance to IS Central entail? In the months following IS Central's initial creation in 2014, the process of pledging *bayah* to the parent group was relatively ad hoc. Aspirant international affiliates' pledges of *bayah*[136] would come via audio, video, or text, on Twitter, in messages on Telegram, in chatrooms, or in private encrypted and unencrypted communications. Alternatively, individuals or

groups could meet with IS representatives and, on rare occasions, pledge *bayah* in person.[137]

While this describes the formalized process of pledging, the nature of response to those pledges from IS Central often varied. Ultimately, there were three kinds of responses. First, it could acknowledge the *bayah* and accept the group's pledge, thus making the pledging group an IS *wilaya* or "province." Second, IS Central could acknowledge the *bayah* but not deem the group a province, rendering it a non-province "affiliate" and simply referring to the pledgers as "soldiers of the caliphate." Importantly, some of these initial affiliate "soldiers of the caliphate" would later become official provinces or wings of official provinces (as was the case in Somalia and Greater Sahara). Third, in the worst-case scenario for pledging groups, IS Central might not even acknowledge that a pledge had been made, and make no response, thereby rendering the group simply part of the IS "network" of loyalists and supporters. To sum up, mimicking the process that Barak Mendelsohn has described in the case of al-Qaeda's affiliates, to become a province, an organization must pledge *bayah* to IS Central; IS Central must accept the *bayah*; and IS Central must publicly announce the new province.[138]

As we demonstrate, the characteristics or capabilities that would-be Islamic State affiliates needed to show so as to be elevated to provincial status varied according to time period. In its nascent days, in 2014, IS Central had relatively lax standards for judging who or what would count as an affiliate. For instance, the *wilayat* proclaimed in Algeria (chapter 3) and Saudi Arabia in late 2014 all ultimately amounted to very little, even while other early African provinces that it accepted, like those in Libya (chapter 2) and especially Sinai (chapter 4), did indeed prove to be durable. Over time, however, IS Central became more stringent about how a *bayah* needed to be rendered, and which groups' *bayah* it would accept. Thus, while pledging groups in Tunisia in 2015 (chapter 5) conducted violence that seemed worthy of qualification for provincial status, as did members of the Islamic State in Greater Sahara (chapter 7) and Somalia (chapter 8), only the latter two would qualify (Greater Sahara as a wing of a province and Somalia as a stand-alone province), and, then, only after years of waiting. By 2019, it appeared as though IS Central's criteria were again evolving, as it recognized the changes in status of both Greater Sahara and Somalia, as

well as according status to militant groups in DRC (chapter 9) and Mozambique (chapter 10) as the wings of the "Central Africa Province."

What lay at the heart of IS Central's tightening standards for vetting affiliates?[139] For parent groups like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, seeking and accepting pledges of global affiliate cells conceivably offered sundry anticipated benefits, as well as pitfalls. Previous scholarship, primarily on al-Qaeda's franchising efforts, has emphasized the potential benefits of this process. Announcing affiliates can make a core jihadi group appear to have greater global legitimacy given that its message finds resonance outside its parochial area of operation. Having global affiliation can help a core jihadi group instill fear in regimes around the world and can also serve as a signaling device to show that the group is on the rise. Moreover, by announcing new affiliates gradually over time, a global parent group can "remain in the headlines." Such provinces or affiliates also allow the parent group to appear powerful and active when the former carry out attacks, even if the core itself is not particularly strong or active.[140] Operationally, having affiliates also offers a central terror group what Colin Clarke calls "strategic reach," or the ability to conduct attacks in its name over a wide area of operations.[141] More practically, social science studies have shown that core terrorist groups that have allies endure longer and are more operationally effective than those that do not.

Yet, as the subsequent chapters show, the Islamic State—like al-Qaeda before it—eventually became hesitant to accept just any pledge of allegiance that was made to it by local African insurgent groups. Instead, it seemingly began to scrutinize aspirant affiliates more carefully, ensuring that, whatever its goals were at the time, the potential downsides of accepting new pledges did not outweigh the benefits. Just what could these downsides be? Based on his study of al-Qaeda's franchising efforts, Barak Mendelsohn has described four primary risks: higher reputational costs in the event of affiliate failure; the strengthening and internationalization of counterterror efforts against both parent and affiliate; damage to the parent organization's image and the coherence of its ideology because of preference divergence with affiliates; and threats to the affiliate organization's cohesion and its leader's authority.[142] For instance, when considering its affiliation with the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), the group that would eventually become al-Qaeda in the Islamic

Maghreb (AQIM), al-Qaeda Core leaders worried that the GSPC's local focus might detract from al-Qaeda Core's own focus on the "far enemy."[143]

And, indeed, by looking at al-Qaeda's experience with global franchising, IS Central seems to have been rightfully wary of unequivocal acceptance of affiliates, and judicious in its tendency to become more selective as time wore on. According to most analyses as well as primary source documents, al-Qaeda Core was never particularly satisfied with its franchising project. Mendelsohn, who has done some of the most thorough analysis of al-Qaeda's affiliations to date, has argued that, overall, its franchising efforts were a failure, rendering it neither more threatening in practice nor helping it achieve its political aims more effectively.[144] Nor, as Colin Clarke notes, was al-Qaeda Core ever able to convince the vast majority of its affiliates to undertake attacks on its preferred "far enemy" targets outside their more localized areas of operation,[145] a focus that would eventually change over time. Daniel Byman, in assessing the value of its affiliates to al-Qaeda in 2014, has argued: "Al-Qaeda faces a host of problems related to delegation and integration [of its affiliates] and often affiliation is a net loss. Divergent preferences and priorities, shirking at the local level, adverse selection, branding problems, and costly control mechanisms all make affiliates of questionable value to the core [al-Qaeda] organization."[146]

These challenges are drawn into even starker relief in documents collected from raids of Bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, following his death in May 2011. They illustrate some of the challenges and risks to al-Qaeda brought by accepting formal affiliation of local insurgencies. As the authors of authors of a report from the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point analyzing the captured documents argue, al-Qaeda Core was never "in sync at the operational level" with its affiliates, and Bin Laden enjoyed "little control" over them.[147] "Rather than a source of strength, Bin Laden was burdened by what he viewed as the incompetence of the 'affiliates,' including their lack of political acumen to win public support, their media campaigns, and their poorly planned operations which resulted in the unnecessary deaths of thousands of Muslims."[148] As for al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda's branch in Somalia, Bin Laden saw "little practical value" in accepting the group's pledge of allegiance, because of his concerns regarding its poor governance tendencies, including

its overly harsh *hudud* punishments for infractions of sharia.[149] As for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Bin Laden "seemed to have spent more time worrying about the group rather than appreciating its contributions," while in the case of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the captured documents "conclusively demonstrate that the failures of [AQI] weighed heavily on Bin Laden,"[150] particularly its tendency to target Shiites. Thus, while affiliation brought al-Qaeda the reputation of having a global reach, it also enmeshed its own reputation with the often undesirable behavior of its local affiliates. Having seen al-Qaeda's often fraught experience with franchising, IS Central thus needed to ensure that it took the process of affiliate utility validation seriously when it considered pledges from African groups.

Once African militant groups decided that becoming formal affiliates of the Islamic State would be a worthwhile endeavor, the process of pledging *bayah* for all entities remained generally similar, though the rapidity of their acceptance and the way they proved that they merited elevation varied from one to the next.

The Post-Bayah Period, Sovereign Subordinates, and Experiences of Islamic State Affiliates in Africa

Upon receiving formal provincial or non-province affiliate status, how did African IS affiliate organizations evolve, and, importantly, to what extent did their relations with IS Central inform this evolution and their subsequent actions? This book argues that all IS's African affiliates came to exist as "sovereign subordinates." By this, we refer to the nature of relationship of the affiliate organization to IS Central: here, the juxtaposition of being both sovereign (suggesting independence) but subordinate (suggesting oversight by a more powerful force) is intentional. In referring to them as sovereign subordinates, we underline that African IS organizations were entities that had pledged allegiance and thus ostensible obedience to IS Central, but, in practical terms, by and large operated independently of widespread material support and operational command from the parent body. While exceptions to this rule certainly exist, in broad stroke, IS groups in Africa are perhaps best thought of as acolytes of the Islamic State's global movement, who nevertheless generally operated according to the exigencies of their own local politics. Despite being

subordinate to the Islamic State Central, they have remained sovereign in most other ways.

On one hand, this book shows how the various IS provinces or non-province affiliates, once their pledges were accepted, became subordinates to IS Central. At their core, as we highlight, the very process of becoming an IS province necessarily entailed subordination to the parent body: to its worldview, to al-Baghdadi as caliph, and to IS Central's broader modus operandi.

On the other hand, we seek to emphasize the generally sovereign or independent nature of African IS provinces and affiliates. Indeed, subordination has most typically been more nominal than practical. After pledging allegiance, in most cases African IS affiliates often received incommensurate benefits. In broad terms, the presumed material benefits that they may have expected have turned out to be limited in scope, or rare in occurrence, or were provided in an inconsistent way. In many—though certainly not all—cases, African provinces or affiliates of the Islamic State have received generally scant material resources, direction,[151] or, in some cases, even attention from IS Central: from an open source perspective, many African affiliate groups have had marginal organizational integration with IS Central. In brief, with some exceptions, material benefits from IS Central never flowed in a meaningful way. As a result, after pledging allegiance (and being accepted as "provinces") most African affiliates were, in broad terms, left to fend for themselves, at least materially. To that end, rather than being directed and funded from above, these groups instead were forced to rely almost entirely on local networks of capital, fighters, and arms for their survival.

However, while material benefits from IS Central were only occasionally conferred on its African affiliates, these groups nevertheless benefited from their ideological connection to IS Central. To that end, new IS provinces were able to leverage an ostensible (though, in reality, weak) connection to IS Central through branding practices, thereby conferring legitimacy on themselves and their leaders. This did, moreover, have the second-order effect of drawing in new recruits and finance from local, not global, sources. Thus, despite being official subordinates of the Islamic State, with some exceptions African IS cells evolved rather autonomously, both from IS Central and from each other.[152]

To be sure, our notion of sovereign subordinates has been addressed indirectly by others studying the global jihadi movements and their international networks. What has emerged as perhaps the most contentious and central debate among scholars of jihadist networks in Africa is the "local versus global" debate,[153] or, more verbosely, the "predominantly local versus strongly influenced from abroad" debate.[154] At their core, these debates center on the priority given to local groups' affiliation to global "parent" groups. In his study of African jihadi groups, Stig Hansen has laid out the evolution of this debate most clearly. In his account, the early study of al-Qaeda on the continent by outside observers was divided between the "alarmists" (who viewed al-Qaeda's relationships with groups on the continent as deep, close, and thus threatening, and who typically came from terrorism or security studies backgrounds), and "cultural determin-ists" or "pragmatists" (who believed local militants used the al-Qaeda moniker simply as a brand name to gain support, and thus viewed these connections as limited and generally non-threatening; these analysts typically came from area studies backgrounds). Increasingly, he has argued, the two sides have come together to offer a more nuanced vision of the relative importance of "local" versus "global" factors, stressing the importance of local over global connections, while not ignoring the importance of the latter.[155] In the same way, jihadi strategists themselves sought to strike the right balance between the "local" versus "global" dialectics involved in the pursuit of jihadi franchising.[156]

Taken collectively, then, this broad experience of African IS affiliates as "sovereign subordinates" helps shed significant light on the second main driving question of this book: why have the Islamic State's African affiliates continued to show fealty and strength—by re-pledging allegiance, conducting and publicizing attacks in the Islamic State's name, growing stronger, and even giving rise to new provinces—after IS Central's seeming decline? In the main, we show that because the African affiliates' primary benefit in their relationship was never really material, but primarily reputational, the declining fortunes of IS Central have been little felt on the ground among its African affiliates. One does not miss what one never had.[157] On the reputational side, however, the idea of the Islamic State's one-time grandeur—and overall world-view—has endured. African affiliates enjoy the ability to invoke, as Aaron Zelin has described it, a

"nostalgia narrative," or the "ability to harken back to the one-time glories of the Islamic State in Iraq, Syria, and Libya."[158] Thus, though their parent group has faltered, this has done little to tarnish the name of the Islamic State on the ground in Africa; indeed, in some cases, it has strengthened the resolve to fight to recapture past glory.

Collectively, the three periods (pre-*bayah*, *bayah*, and post-*bayah*) experienced by all African IS organizations, and the three corresponding lenses (democratization of jihad, affiliate utility validation, and sovereign subordinates), enable us to address at least three understudied phenomena in conflict studies and African studies. First, while a great deal of ink has been spilled to unpack al-Qaeda's franchising strategy, far less work has been done in the same vein as regards the Islamic State. This work is one of the first to do so by using case studies from the African continent. Second, while a broad body of work has emerged to explain why a parent jihadi group might seek to incorporate affiliates, relatively less time has been spent conceptualizing the comparative rationales behind why local groups might seek to become affiliates of a larger one,[159] including how experiences of affiliation compare and contrast, and why affiliates remain engaged even when the parent group experiences decline. Third, as Stig Hansen has noted, despite many excellent group-level studies of African jihadi groups besides his own[160] and those of a few other scholars,[161] relatively little has been written comparing the experiences and evolution of jihadi groups across the continent.[162] This work seeks to address all three gaps in the literature.

Moving Forward

In the chapters that follow, we discuss how prominent jihadis leaders and the groups they led in Africa responded to al-Adnani's call for Muslims around the world to pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State. To do so, we circumnavigate the continent, tracing the chronology of pledges to IS Central from around Africa. We begin with pledges of allegiance from Libya (chapter 2), and Algeria (chapter 3), and the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt (chapter 4). Before moving south, we shed light on the Islamic State's most robust non-province affiliate, in Tunisia (chapter 5).

The next section of the book turns its attention towards Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa's IS cells, which emerged slightly later than their North African counterparts. We turn to the Lake Chad region of West Africa—the intersection of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon—to investigate the largest and most powerful IS affiliate in Africa today, the Islamic State West Africa Province, a product of the group formerly known as Boko Haram (chapter 6). Our discussion next moves further afield in West Africa to the Sahel region, where we investigate the rise and capabilities of what would eventually become a wing of ISWAP, a group known as ISWAP–Greater Sahara (chapter 7). Moving across the continent, we turn to Somalia (chapter 8) before discussing the Islamic State's newest affiliates operating under the "Central Africa Province" moniker in the Democratic Republic of Congo (chapter 9) and Mozambique (chapter 10), both insurgent groups with no known sustained previous relationships with al-Qaeda. Chapter 11 offers our conclusions in which we synthesize the preceding chapters, highlighting the differences and similarities between affiliates, as well as the broader implications of the emergence and evolution of IS provinces in Africa for the future of global jihadism, geopolitics, and more.

2

THE ISLAMIC STATE IN LIBYA

PART ONE
THE PRE-BAYAH PERIOD

*

Downfall

*

Libya
2011

The story of the emergence of the Islamic State in Libya might be said, in part, to find its origins with the downfall of Libya's long-time strongman, Muammar Qaddafi. Following the deposing of Tunisia's president, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali on January 14, 2011,[1] anti-government protests swept much of the Arab world. Beginning in Egypt on January 25, anti-government demonstrations spread to Yemen on January 27, and to Libya on February 5. Protests in Benghazi and Zintan began in earnest on

February 15, and by the 17th had reached the capital and many eastern cities, including Derna.

In the face of these protests, Muammar Qaddafi, who had ruled over Libya since coming to power by a military coup in 1969, refused to step down. As demonstrations mounted, Libyan government forces resorted to firing on protestors with attack helicopters and artillery.[2] Qaddafi's attempted counteroffensive and graphic, televised threats against protestors resulted in harsh resolutions by the UN Security Council condemning his response.[3] On March 19, 2011, NATO members intervened militarily in Libya.[4] Libya's first civil war had begun.

On one side, anti-Qaddafi forces coalesced[5] into a fractious coalition of rebel groups mobilized along geographic, personal, and ideological lines,[6] all working under the auspices of the National Transitional Council (NTC). These anti-Qaddafi insurgents—ecumenical in their composition—nominally united under the NTC's authority and, backed by substantial NATO air support,[7] gradually seized control of much of the country, culminating in their capture of the Libyan capital, Tripoli, on August 28, 2011.[8] For his part, Qaddafi fled the capital on the same day for his hometown of Sirte, where he was pursued and quickly surrounded by rebel fighters from both Misrata and Benghazi. During an attempt to escape the city on October 20, nine months after protests had initially begun, Qaddafi's convoy was hit by NATO airstrikes. Qaddafi and his surviving bodyguards and companions were then ambushed by Misratan fighters,[9] who captured the dictator, found hiding in a drainpipe. Cell phone videos taken by bystanders show soldiers beating him and then sodomizing him with a bayonet before shooting him dead.[10]

What followed in the aftermath of Qaddafi's downfall was a complicated, contentious, and ultimately failed attempt to build a new Libyan state in the vacuum left by the collapse of his highly centralized and personalized dictatorship. While Libya's fractious opposition parties and militias jockeyed for the opportunity to fill it, this vacuum was also eventually exploited by the Islamic State. The NTC, which had formed the political face of the opposition during the war against Qaddafi, managed to conduct Libya's first successful national election in July 2012,[11] establishing the General National Congress (GNC) as the country's new

parliament in Tripoli. Notably, the GNC was marked by a more pronounced Islamist character than had been evident in political life under Qaddafi. Nonetheless, the security situation remained highly volatile, with the new central government exercising little de facto control over the territory of Libya, as hundreds of different militia units attempted to control a constellation of fiefdoms across the country.[12]

* * *

The Formation of the Battar Brigade in Syria

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Libya and Syria
2011–2014

While Libya descended into violence as contending power brokers and their associated militias fought for primacy, more than a thousand miles away, another popular uprising had begun to unfold in Syria. Following the late February 2011 detention of teenagers for writing graffiti denigrating Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, protests by family members and tribal networks of those jailed began, and then escalated, in the southern city of Deraa, and security services responded with violent, uncompromising crackdowns.[13] As security forces killed protestors, funerals turned into demonstrations, fueling an escalating cycle of protest and violence that quickly engulfed Syria in a national uprising.[14] While initial protests appealed for al-Assad himself to intervene against local officials blamed for the crackdowns, the president proved uncompromising, and protestors' demands shifted from the need for accountability from local officials to calls for the fall of the al-Assad regime in its entirety.[15] Despite protests spreading throughout most of the country and some demonstrations numbering in the hundreds of thousands, the al-Assad regime remained intransigent, continuing its violent assaults on protestors.

Opposition to al-Assad's tactics led large numbers of soldiers to desert and defect from the Syrian Arab Army (SAA). Civilians, too, took up arms, first to protect demonstrations,[16] and later to undertake insurgent attacks on

security forces.[17] By the fall of 2011, the Syrian uprising against al-Assad had largely militarized;[18] anti-Assad rebels took control of large stretches of the Syrian countryside as government forces found themselves stretched thin as a result of wide-ranging deployments and shrinking ranks caused by desertion.[19] By July 29, 2011, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) had formed, marking a formal militarization of what had begun as a peaceful anti-government protest movement.

Even in the midst of their own country's worsening security situation, pockets of Libyans—still riding high on the euphoria of the post-Qaddafi era—quickly found in the Syrian uprisings a parallel to their own recent experiences. For young Libyans who had just succeeded in overthrowing Qaddafi, Bashar al-Assad—another symbol of oppressive despotism in the Arab world—became the next target. That parallels were drawn between Libya and Syria was understandable: both had been ruled by autocratic families for decades through patrimonial networks bankrolled by oil and gas revenues,[20] who often harshly silenced dissent through shadowy intelligence services. Moreover, unlike most other countries caught up in the Arab Spring, both Libya and Syria had seen their own protests spiral into armed violence, with Syria's armed conflict escalating just as the war against Qaddafi was drawing to a close. What Libyans had accomplished against Qaddafi, some reasoned, could also be repeated with al-Assad. As one young Libyan told researcher Frederic Wehrey, "We'd suffered, and we knew the Syrians were suffering too."[21]

Thus, as early as 2011, and especially following Qaddafi's death in October of that year,[22] scores of Libyans began moving to Syria to fight the al-Assad regime, serving as some of the very first foreign fighters in that country's rapidly internationalizing civil conflict. Though mostly not jihadis—rather, at this point, simply Islamists[23]—by June 2012, an estimated 700 to 1,200 foreign fighters had entered Syria to fight alongside the armed opposition against the al-Assad regime.[24] Libyans, many of them veterans of the recently concluded war against Qaddafi, formed a significant share of these foreign fighters, defined as fighters who travel from their home country to fight in a second country, primarily for ideological (and not material) motivations.[25] Indeed, at least initially, many journeyed to Syria for political rather than explicitly religious reasons, seeing themselves as fighting in a common political revolution for greater accountability in the

Arab world, rather than participating in a common "jihadi" struggle.[26] Other Libyans who had just helped overthrow Qaddafi expressed great emotional and geopolitical empathy for the Syrians attempting to overthrow al-Assad.[27]

Whatever their reasons for entering the Syrian conflict—political, religious, monetary, or personal—when Libyan foreign fighters arrived in late 2011 and 2012, they needed to make decisions about which groups they would align themselves with. Much as Libya's own war had seen the proliferation of armed groups holding a wide variety of ideologies, Libyans in Syria became similarly stratified along ideological lines. Many simply joined Syrian groups outright, while others established their own independent armed groups.

Some Libyans opted to create their own distinct militia, the Battar Brigade (the Katibat al-Battar al-Libi, or KBL), rather than integrating with Syria's official al-Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra (JaN), which was quickly becoming a primary destination for other foreign fighters entering Syria's war.[28] Much as Syrian Salafist groups refused to join the nationalist Free Syrian Army, some Libyan Salafists who saw themselves as fighting a transnationalist jihad instead of a more secular struggle against dictatorship opted to remain outside those nationalist opposition structures, even though they often cooperated with nationalist groups on the battlefield. Formed in 2012,[29] the Battar Brigade, which was notable for being composed of some of the first foreign contingents to arrive in Syria,[30] its soldiers mostly coming from the Libyan city of Derna,[31] operated under the slogan, "We came to slaughter you."[32]

As 2012 progressed, the predominantly Libyan Battar Brigade proved itself to be a capable fighting force within Syria's civil war. While many Battar Brigade fighters were fresh from the fight against Qaddafi, other members had fought in Iraq and Afghanistan.[33] Financially, the group was relatively well resourced: some Battar Brigade members allegedly maintained communications and weapons transfer links with military groups in Libya, and also received financial assistance from businessmen and charities in their hometowns in Libya, especially Derna.[34]

As the flow of foreign fighters of all nationalities into Syria accelerated significantly in 2013—more than doubling in number between April and

December of that year[35]—they found themselves amid an intensifying "domestic" dispute between the Syrian al-Qaeda affiliate, Jabhat al-Nusra (JaN), and its Iraqi counterpart, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). Although JaN had originated as an expeditionary force sent to Syria by ISI in August 2011,[36] JaN had managed to secure a position for itself as al-Qaeda's official Syrian affiliate by spring 2013. This occurred just as the relationship between the ambitious al-Baghdadi, leader of ISI, and Ayman al-Zawahiri, the global leader of al-Qaeda and al-Baghdadi's ostensible superior, continued to deteriorate. When al-Baghdadi unilaterally declared that ISI and JaN would merge again to form the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS/ISIL) under his authority in April 2013, the leader of JaN, Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, refused to participate. In support of al-Jolani, al-Zawahiri affirmed JaN's independence from al-Baghdadi's ISI and ordered ISI to return to Iraq from Syria. Al-Baghdadi's refusal[37] to limit his organization's reach to Iraq provoked serious tensions, ultimately resulting in al-Zawahiri's denunciation of ISIS/ISIL—and revocation of its place in the al-Qaeda network—in February 2014.[38]

On the ground inside Syria, al-Baghdadi's attempts to dominate the transnational Salafi-jihadi movement provoked a crisis, as foreign fighters were forced to choose between organizations rather than focusing on fighting the al-Assad regime. A majority—both those who had already entered and those newly arriving—ultimately joined or switched allegiance to al-Baghdadi's newly rebranded Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS/ISIL).[39] This, too, was ultimately true for Battar Brigade members, who came under ISIS/ISIL's banner.[40] This decision to side with the new ISIS/ISIL would prove a pivotal moment for the emergence of the Islamic State in Africa, as members of the Battar Brigade would, after their time fighting in Syria's civil war, ultimately return to a divided Libya in late 2013.

* * *

The Predecessor to the Islamic State in Libya:
The Emergence of Ansar al-Sharia

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Meanwhile, Libyan politics continued to degenerate into chaos. In the aftermath of Qaddafi's downfall, the GNC—the new Tripoli-based parliament—emerged in 2012 with an eighteen-month mandate to create a new constitution for the country. When that deadline passed with no new constitution, the GNC extended its term in office without new elections, eliciting an extensive backlash. By spring 2014, a new Libyan civil war had begun, as Khalifa Haftar—a Qaddafi-era general turned US citizen who had returned to Libya during the 2011 uprising against Qaddafi—attempted to overthrow the sitting profoundly weak Islamist-leaning GNC government,[41] with the support of a coalition of militias calling itself the Libyan National Army (LNA).[42]

Promising to rid Libya of the chaos of informal militia rule, troops loyal to General Haftar and the LNA stormed the GNC parliament on May 18, 2014,[43] declaring the body dissolved.[44] In response, the GNC organized new elections, which were held in late June 2014. Although voter turnout plummeted to 18 percent—compared with around 60 percent during the initial post-Gaddafi elections for the GNC in July 2012—a new government, called the House of Representatives (HOR), was formed. The election outcome saw many of the Islamist parties that had dominated the GNC parliament lose the bulk of their representation to secularist candidates.[45] Tensions quickly mounted between the militias aligned with the Islamist-dominated GNC and those aligned with the new secularist-dominated HOR. This culminated in an assault by GNC-aligned groups on HOR-aligned units at Tripoli's airport, which drove Haftar's HOR-aligned allies from the capital.[46] The victory of the GNC-aligned groups in Tripoli forced the new HOR legislature to flee to the eastern city of Tobruk,[47] creating a severe constitutional crisis. Instead of a new state for the post-Qaddafi era, two rival legislatures—the western, Islamist-dominated GNC parliament elected in 2012 and the eastern, secularist HOR elected in 2014—each claimed to be the legitimate government of Libya. Each was also backed by a coalition of militia units. Indeed, it was in the context of this power vacuum—a Libya riven by two rival governments in a leaderless country full of Islamist militias—that the Islamic State would emerge.

As Libyan politics bubbled over at the national level, locally a jihadi group began to form that would set the stage for the emergence of the Islamic State in Libya. That group, called Ansar al-Sharia Libya (ASL), or Supporters of Islamic Law, had formed in Benghazi during the upheavals of 2011. Its ideologies would find resonance throughout Libya and across the continent: new Ansar al-Sharia branches eventually emerged throughout Libya, including in Derna, Sirte, Tripoli, and many other small cities and towns,[48] and ultimately beyond the country, in Tunisia (AST) and in Egypt (ASE).[49] Calling for the widespread institution of sharia in Libya, ASL would eventually serve as one of the antecedent groups to the Islamic State in Libya. Led by Mohamed al-Zahawi, a former prisoner of Qaddafi,[50] who had been detained in the notorious Abu Salim prison in Tripoli, ASL was unequivocally jihadi in orientation.[51] At its core, as Aaron Zelin notes, ASL emerged with a commitment to *tawhid* (the notion of pure monotheism), *takfir* (the notion that those Muslims not living in accordance with the Quran are to be rightfully excommunicated), and thus jihad (the notion that violent action against those opposing these values—including Western powers and democratically oriented regimes—is justified).[52] Importantly, over the course of its existence, ASL would deny being affiliated to al-Qaeda, though it would often issue statements of support for it, and members of ASL were known to have communicated with al-Qaeda figures.[53] Writing in late 2016, Emily Estelle and Katherine Zimmerman noted that ASL "actively coordinates" with various other groups in al-Qaeda's broader North African and Sahelian networks, and that its broader goal was to "build popular support and strength that follows Al-Qaeda leadership's strategic guidance."[54]

Thus, beginning in 2011 and continuing for several years, ASL undertook both *dawa* (community-based charity work) and, to a lesser extent, *hudud* (punishments for un-Islamic behavior). In Benghazi, Ansar al-Sharia operated as a de facto fill-in for the state, undertaking social services like providing food and housing for the poor, overseeing medical clinics for women and children, launching anti-drug campaigns, and even engaging in infrastructure maintenance and repairs, fixing bridges and cleaning garbage.[55] For these efforts, ASL and its local branches gained tremendous support in Benghazi and other towns across Libya. At the same time, ASL in Benghazi was not averse to using violence, including against

those who disobeyed its edicts. Among other instances, ASL in Libya prior to 2014 is known to have confiscated biology books from the European School in Benghazi for depicting bodies in a way deemed "pornographic," in addition to destroying Sufi shrines for supporting idolatry and whipping Libyans who were allegedly ignoring its edicts.[56]

Ansar al-Sharia would claim its most noteworthy attack when, on September 11, 2012, members of ASL in Benghazi[57] attacked the US Consulate in the city,[58] killing the US ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens, then visiting the consulate there, and three others. In the United States, questions around the responsibility of the killings would lead to wide-ranging congressional investigations, lasting two years and four months, culminating in the so-called Benghazi hearing at which former secretary of state Hillary Clinton testified in front of a House Select Committee.

Soon after the attack on the consulate, tens of thousands of Libyans, angered by ASL's killing of Stevens, whom many in the community respected, marched in Benghazi, raiding ASL's headquarters,[59] destroying a truck, taking down its flags, and forcing Ansar al-Sharia underground, though not its disbandment.[60] It would reemerge in Benghazi in March 2013,[61] and by June 2013 a branch of ASL formed in Derna[62] whose slogan was "A step toward building the Islamic state."[63]

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The Homecoming of the Battar Brigade to Derna

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Syria and Libya
2013 and 2014

How then did the Islamic State emerge in Libya? The Islamic State secured its first foothold in the African continent when Libyan foreign fighters from the Battar Brigade who had fought in the Syrian civil war began returning home in late 2013,[64] and started forming relationships with members of Ansar al-Sharia–Libya.

Various reasons account for the return home of the Libyan foreign fighters. For some, the realities of the Syrian civil war proved too brutal. One young man, Ahmed, stayed only from August 2013 to January 2014, leaving after he saw his Libyan friend killed in action in Syria.[65] Others returned when the violence in Syria escalated as ISIS/ISIL gained more prominence or when Libya's own civil war between the Islamist GNC and Haftar's LNA began to intensify. For yet others, returning to Libya may have offered new opportunities for military advancement: having fought with ISIS/ISIL in Syria in the "big leagues" arguably served as a marker of jihadi competence which could be parlayed into a commanding position within a Libyan militia, allowing the itinerant jihadi to recast himself from being a low-level fighter in the Middle Eastern theater to becoming a potential commander in the North African one.[66]

Yet, arguably the most important reason why members of the Battar Brigade returned to Libya was that they had been instructed to do so by the leadership of ISIS/ISIL. Indeed, some Libyans who had traveled to Syria to join ISIS/ISIL were told upon arriving there by ISIS/ISIL leadership to return home to Libya,[67] to which ISIS/ISIL core commanders had already dispatched teams to form a Libyan branch of the caliphate. On their return, their sights were set on the city of Derna, to which, beginning in spring 2014,[68] approximately 300 soldiers from the Battar Brigade returned.[69]

A substantial percentage of Libyans in the Battar Brigade had originally hailed from Derna, a city on the shores of the Mediterranean with a population of around 100,000.[70] Derna is known for its association with international jihadism.[71] In the 1980s, men from Derna went to fight the Soviets alongside the mujahideen of Afghanistan, returning home at the war's end in 1989 to form the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which itself led a failed attempt to topple Qaddafi in the 1990s.[72] Post-9/11, Derna came to serve as an epicenter for the production of jihadi foreign fighters in the wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan, so much so that in a study of records of al-Qaeda foreign fighters in Afghanistan between August 2006 and 2007, it was found that the city or town producing the largest number of foreign fighters per capita in the world—by a long shot, in fact—was Derna.[73]

Thus, for the incipient ISIS/ISIL, Derna made good sense as its first extra-Middle East base. Not only had it served as a hotbed of jihadism in the past, but its lack of functioning government in the aftermath of

Qaddafi's downfall and its weak security institutions made it attractive.[74] Indeed, the Islamic State had long set its sights on Libya as a prime area for expansion, forming one of the Islamic State's "top ambitions."[75] In the first issue of the Islamic State's magazine *Dabiq*, the greater North Africa region was prioritized as an area for expansion, with Libya particularly cited for its superlative potential.[76]

Upon returning to their native city of Derna, Battar Brigade fighters encountered sundry secular and jihadi insurgent groups, some left over from the overthrow of Qaddafi, others newly formed. Among these were members of ASL, which had expanded from its original base in Benghazi, and had created a new cell in Derna. Soon after, members of the returning Battar Brigade merged with ISIS/ISIL-sympathetic members of Ansar al-Sharia[77] to form a new group, the Islamic Youth Shura Council (or Majlis Shura Shabab al-Islam, or MSSI). The MSSI would serve as the antecedent group to the first IS province in Libya.[78]

Composed of a combination of jihadi groups,[79] the MSSI first officially declared its presence in Derna in April 2014. On the 4th of that month, masked members of MSSI entered the city in pickup trucks—brandishing rocket-propelled grenade launchers, anti-aircraft cannons, and machine guns—and proclaimed that henceforth sharia would be the law of the land, and the MSSI, not the local police, would serve as the new security apparatus within the city.[80] By May 2014, the group's members were undertaking security patrols within Derna. In addition, members of the MSSI began enforcing the group's own codes of conduct, often brutally. A slew of media releases in April and May 2014 show the group cutting off a man's hand for stealing, shooting three men accused of homosexuality, beheading a man accused of being a "sorcerer," and burning banned cigarettes and pipes used for smoking *shisha*. And yet, at this point, though MSSI was undertaking ISIS/ISIL-like activities (imposing sharia law and providing a modicum of security and governance), and included former ISIS/ISIL-aligned members (who had been part of the Battar Brigade in Syria), the group by June 2014 was simply a hardline jihadi outfit, working on its own accord. That ostensible independence from ISIS/ISIL Central, however, was soon to change.

On June 22, 2014, the MSSI issued its first statement of support (though not *bayah*)[81] to ISIS/ISIL. It read: "It is incumbent on us to support this

oppressed Islamic State that is taken as an enemy by those near and those far, among the *kuffar* (infidels) or the *munafiqeen* (hypocrites) or those with *marda al-nafous* (deceased souls) alike."[82] Following this statement of support—made just a week before the June 29 declaration of the Islamic State's caliphate with al-Baghdadi as caliph—the MSSI continued its morality patrols around Derna throughout the summer to ensure that citizens were acting in line with the dictates of sharia and calling them to account for inappropriate behavior. In August 2014, the MSSI posted images of its members confiscating drugs and alcohol from the citizens of Derna, and, in an extreme example of punishment, conducting what one observer has called "a Taliban-esque public execution" at a soccer stadium on August 18, 2014,[83] handing a man's relative a pistol with which to kill him.[84]

Besides punishments, the MSSI publicly made its presence known through both bureaucratic and cultural events. Members arranged a celebration of the declaration of support to the Islamic State at the al-Sahaba mosque. With games for children and religious sermons for adults, the forum also allowed the new group to show off its new *Hisbah* police cars, while religious *nashids* (religious music), which had been published by the Islamic State's Ajnad Media outlet, played in the background.[85] Elsewhere, it organized large public screenings of ISIS/ISIL propaganda videos and arranged public speaking engagements for lecturers sympathetic to the Islamic State. It established "information kiosks" to distribute written information. Thus by September 2014, though the MSSI was showing clear signs of sympathy for the Islamic State, no formal pledge of allegiance, or *bayah*, had yet been made, at least publicly.

As it would be shown to do in other spaces throughout the continent, the rise of the Islamic State served to democratize jihad in Libya. Whereas ASL and a number of other Islamist groups in Libya were sympathetic to and ideologically aligned with al-Qaeda, the attraction of a new, more powerful, and eager ally in the form of IS Central would suffice to pull the MSSI into its orbit.

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PART TWO
THE BAYAH PERIOD

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A Pledge of Allegiance, with Assistance, and a Wait

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October and November 2014
Derna, Libya

Indeed, the push towards self-incorporation into the Islamic State's universe continued when on October 3,[86] MSSI rebranded itself as Wilayat Derna, or the Derna Province of the Islamic State. On that day, the MSSI declared that all of the lands under its control would henceforth be part of the Islamic State's global caliphate, a development Aaron Zelin suggests was due to the possible infusion of some ISIS/ISIL members from Syria to Derna shortly before.[87] This move—to unilaterally self-declare itself a *wilaya*—would later become rare in the African IS universe, and did not actually elevate the MSSI to the status of a *wilaya*. In the lexicon of the Islamic State's global caliphate, even though members of MSSI had declared themselves a *wilaya*, Derna had not yet actually achieved affiliate utility validation, given that it had not received official recognition from IS Central.

Instead, Derna's official recognition as a *wilaya*, like that of other *wilayat* around the world, would be announced in November 2014.[88] After pledges of *bayah* that are believed to have occurred on November 10, 2014,[89] al-Baghdadi declared in an audio message entitled "Even if the Disbelievers Despise Such" on November 13, 2014:

> Glad tidings, O Muslims, for we give you good news by announcing the expansion of the Islamic State to new lands, to the lands of al-Haramayn [Saudi Arabia] and Yemen … to Egypt, Libya, and Algeria. We announce the acceptance of the *bayah* of those who gave us *bayah* in those lands, the nullification of the groups therein, the announcement of the new *wilayat* for the Islamic State … We also announce the acceptance of *bayah* given

> by the groups and individuals in all of those mentioned *wilayat* and others. We ask every individual amongst them to join the closest *wilaya* to him, and to hear and obey the *wali* appointed by us for it.[90]

At that time, in November 2014, IS Central not only declared that Derna had been made its own *wilaya*, but that the Islamic State would in fact have three *wilayat* throughout Libya, the only occasion on the African continent when the Islamic State administratively divided its forces in a country into multiple *wilayat*, as it had done in Iraq and Syria. These three IS *wilayat* in Libya overlapped with Libya's three pre-existing historical regions: Barqa, Tarabulus, and Fezzan, all Ottoman-era administrative divisions, which had existed until a restructuring of Libyan administrative units in 1963. In the east of the country was Wilayat Barqa, sometimes also called Cyrenaica, which included the cities of Benghazi, Derna, Tobruk, and Ajdabiya. In the west of the country was Wilayat Tarabulus, sometimes called Tripolitania, which encompassed the cities of Tripoli, Sirte, Misrata, and Sabratha. Finally, in the southwestern Libyan desert was Wilayat Fezzan.[91] With the process of affiliate utility validation complete, IS Central took over MSSI's media operations,[92] ensuring that henceforth all jihadi propaganda emanating from its three Libyan *wilayat* would appear with its branding.

While the alliance of members of the Battar Brigade and Ansar al-Sharia–Libya laid the groundwork for the genesis of the Islamic State in Libya, the pledge was not simply an initiative of these groups alone: it would be revealed that IS Central had courted the groups to secure their pledge. As early as 2013, evidence suggests that the future caliph of the Islamic State, al-Baghdadi, sent scouts on a mission to Derna to "evaluate the possibility of exploiting the accommodating jihadi environ-ment."[93] Eventually, IS Central deployed several envoys to Libya with the goal of establishing a province.

Arguably the most important envoy that IS Central ever sent to Africa was Abu Mughirah al-Qahtani (also known as Wissam Abd al-Zubaidi[94] and, more colloquially, Abu Nabil al-Anbari, or Abu Nabil of Anbar [the province of Iraq]), dispatched by al-Baghdadi to Derna in September 2014. An Iraqi national, al-Qahtani had been an early member of the predecessor to the Islamic State, al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), when it was ruled by Abu

Musab al-Zarqawi in the mid-2000s.[95] An intelligence officer[96] and associate of al-Baghdadi, whom he had met while imprisoned in the Bucca Prison in Basra, Iraq, al-Qahtani eventually became a governor of the Islamic State's Salah al-Din province in Iraq, just north of Baghdad, where the cities of Tikrit, Samarra and Baiji are located.[97] Before coming to Libya, al-Qahtani was responsible for a raid on a military camp known as Camp Speicher near Tikrit, Iraq, on June 12, 2014, that killed more than 1,700 air cadets—mostly Shia and non-Muslim—in one of ISIS/ISIL's deadliest-ever attacks.[98]

As the Islamic State's Derna cell got under way in the fall of 2014, al-Baghdadi decided to send al-Qahtani, a sure-fire and time-tested emissary, to Derna in September 2014[99] to help establish IS branches and lead operations there.[100] Importing best practices from the Islamic State's governance of its nascent caliphate in Iraq and Syria,[101] al-Qahtani officially annexed Derna in the name of the Islamic State.[102] Eventually, al-Qahtani served as the emir, or leader, of the three IS provinces in Libya.[103] His efforts at forming the first IS cell in Libya were be accomplished through deft recruitment tactics, drawing on various interested parties to create the fighting force needed for the creation of the proto-state. In the end Al-Qahtani incorporated the members of MSSI, as well as convincing foreign fighters passing through Libya for training on their way to Syria, to stay in Libya and join the Islamic State.[104]

There were two other notable emissaries sent in September 2014 by IS Central, a Yemeni judge named Abu al-Bara al-Azdi and a Saudi named Abu Habib al-Jazrawi.[105] Al-Azdi would be appointed the *wali*—or governor—of the Islamic State's Derna constituency,[106] while al-Jazrawi would be appointed the *mufti*—or Islamist jurisprudence advisor—overseeing teams of recruiters. These men were instrumental in winning over some members of Ansar al-Sharia to the Islamic State's side in Derna.

Indicative of the value it placed on its presence in Libya, IS Central had by fall 2014 begun telling newly arrived Libyan foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria to return home,[107] ostensibly to help with efforts there. By the end of 2014, it began calling for Islamist militants from across Africa and beyond to emigrate to Libya.[108] As Manni Crone notes, "the establishment of the Derna province was thus a decision taken at the very highest level of the

Islamic State."[109] Thus, unlike those of other Islamic State African affiliate groups, the experiences of Libyan *wilayat* were unique in their need to prove affiliate utility validation. Having been curated by the Islamic State Central itself—which viewed a presence in Libya as a boon for its aspirant global caliphate—the elevation of Libyan *wilayat* to provincial status was not as hard-won as other groups' efforts would be.

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PART THREE
THE POST-BAYAH PERIOD

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The Islamic State's Rise and Fall in Derna

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Derna, Libya
2014

Having made the full transition to an Islamic State *wilaya*, the former MSSI, Ansar al-Sharia and Battar Brigade members who composed the Derna branch began launching various attacks, both to prove its competence to IS Central and to increase its domestic and international profile and thus boost recruitment.[110] At its height, the Islamic State commanded as many as 1,100 fighters in Derna.[111] Soon after its official elevation to a province, it made its presence known, for the most nefarious of reasons. In November 2014, Human Rights Watch released a damning short report detailing the abuses that some citizens of Derna had been experiencing under the rule of the new Islamic State's predecessor groups, which, in November 2014, controlled some, but not all, of Derna. "In the absence of any state authorities, extremist militias have unleashed a reign of terror against [Derna's] inhabitants," it warned.[112] In one particularly macabre story, a man from Derna told researchers from Human Rights Watch the story of eight young men attending their friend's bachelor party the month before the provinces were announced. "[Two] masked men … lined up eight young

men at al-Sahaba Square and punished each with forty whips after they were caught drinking alcoholic beverages at a bachelor party."[113]

As the Islamic State occupied some parts of Derna in late 2014 to mid-2015,[114] the Islamic State's presence began to grow throughout the rest of Libya, including a presence in Benghazi and Sabratha.[115] Besides Wilayat Barqa (in which Derna was situated), its other *wilayat* also began undertaking violence: on January 27, 2015,[116] members of Wilayat Tarabulus, in the city of Tripoli, claimed responsibility for an attack on the Corinthia Hotel, a well-known resort for elite Libyans and visiting Westerners, conducted by a Tunisian and Sudanese citizen.[117] The attack killed ten people, five of whom were foreign citizens.[118]

There were several reasons for the Islamic State's growth in Libya. First, the Islamic State's reputation outside Libya was rising. After the Libyan *wilayat* were declared in November 2014, IS Central began to grow in prominence, and indeed, was at the height of its power in 2014, occupying the Syrian city of Raqqa and Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul.[119] Its global profile gave credence to the potential viability of its Libyan *wilayat*. Second, Libya came to serve as an ideal landing pad for those who had tired of fighting in Iraq and Syria but sought to remain engaged in a lower-level jihad. This occurred not only because of Libyans returning home, but also because calls were increasingly made for foreign fighters to come try their hand at fighting in Libya.[120] Third, while the Islamic State's global brand was surging, members of the incipient IS groups in Libya began to attract members of other existing jihadi groups. It was especially effective in attracting members of Ansar al-Sharia not only through leveraging the Islamic State's rising global brand, but by assassinating leaders of competitor groups that did not support the Islamic State's agenda.[121] In short, over the course of 2015, Derna transformed from a peripheral satellite of the Islamic State to a full-fledged IS statelet for which the Islamic State would provide substantial funding,[122] guidance, and support.[123]

The Islamic State's ascendance in Libya, and especially Derna, engendered resistance both domestically and internationally. Locally, the influx of foreign fighters began to anger some citizens of Derna (a city already noted for a history of opposition to foreign aggression), who

opposed the occupation of their city by foreigners. Once the Islamic State began committing abuses against the population, under the leadership of Salim Darbi,[124] various militia groups in Derna (composed primarily of non-jihadis as well as al-Qaeda associated militias)[125] united to form an alliance called the Derna Mujahideen Shura Council,[126] with the intention of getting rid of the IS presence in the city. The Shura Council declared war on the Islamic State in June 2015 in response to the murder of one of its leaders by members of the Islamic State.[127] It effectively regained control of the city by the end of the summer, and by the fall it had succeeded in almost entirely pushing the Islamic State out of central Derna,[128] even though the group remained on Derna's outskirts.[129]

In addition to these anti-IS efforts by Libyan militias, the presence of multiple IS provinces within the country also elicited significant international anxiety. Marking the first time that it had launched a strike on the Islamic State outside Iraq and Syria,[130] the US began its campaign against the Islamic State in Libya in November 2015, when it killed al-Qahtani—al-Baghdadi's confidant and the emir of IS in Libya—in an airstrike outside Derna,[131] where IS militants still held positions. Thus, as a result of a combination of pressure from local militias and international airstrikes, the Islamic State was dislodged from Derna by late 2015.[132] And yet, despite its ouster from that city, the Islamic State's brightest days in Libya were still to come.

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From Derna to Sirte

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Sirte, Libya
July 2015—December 2016

In the post-2011 world, Sirte—home to nearly 125,000 people, located on the Mediterranean Sea—was a city that held a notorious place in Libyans' collective imagination because of its association with the deposed Libyan dictator, Muammar Qaddafi, who had been born outside the city in the

village of Qasr Abu Hadi on June 7, 1942. After assuming control of the country in September 1969, Qaddafi set about on a targeted mission to put Sirte at the center of a patronage scheme intended to bolster his native home. To that end, he relocated government institutions to Sirte away from Tripoli, creating a university, seaside villas, and public housing there. Simultaneously, he used Sirte as a playground for favored members of his patronage network, while also promoting the development of his own Qaddafi tribe over others from Sirte.[133]

How did the Islamic State establish its second major Libyan foothold in Sirte? While the Islamic State in Derna was thriving between April 2014 and June 2015, other pro-IS militants established a strong presence in Sirte,[134] primarily by co-opting existing networks of Ansar al-Sharia members located there.[135] Following the battle for Sirte that ended with Qaddafi's death in 2011, the city fell into lawlessness as militias from other cities engaged in criminal activity. Sirte native Fawzi al-Ayat, already radicalized following a stint in prison under Qaddafi, founded a branch of Ansar al-Sharia, which, in the face of the lawlessness in Sirte, aggressively combated drug gangs and adjudicated land disputes, earning significant public praise.[136]

Within the Sirte faction of Ansar al-Sharia founded by al-Ayat, some members began to express sympathy for the Islamic State's radical vision of establishing a caliphate. Fearing an assault by General Haftar's anti-Islamist LNA forces, al-Ayat journeyed to Syria in the fall of 2014 to seek support from IS Central. In Raqqa, al-Ayat and three Libyan companions were told to return to Libya, to which IS Central had already sent three lieutenants—the Iraqi al-Qahtani, the Yemeni al-Azdi, and the Saudi al-Jazrawi.[137] By the end of 2014, al-Ayat had formally pledged allegiance to the Islamic State,[138] and by February 2015 the Sirte-based group (as part of the broader Wilayat Tarabu-lus/Tripolitania) had absorbed most Ansar al-Sharia fighters,[139] forming what one journalist described as "an extremist supergroup."[140]

Islamic State was able to establish Sirte as a new home because other jihadi groups found it a relatively unattractive city; the competition it faced there was accordingly limited. Sirte was still symbolically associated with Qaddafi—it was his hometown, his last holdout, and the city in which he was killed in October 2011—and had an arguably tarnished image in the

post-Qaddafi Libyan order. Other militia groups also viewed Sirte as a less attractive prize than other large cities like Benghazi and Tripoli or Libya's other oil-rich regions further south.[141] Sirte had also been heavily damaged in the course of the hunt for Qaddafi, and thus was in greater disrepair than other cities.[142] Moreover, those tribes that had been associated with Qaddafi —the Qaddadfa, Warfalla, and Magharba—which had been marginalized since his downfall,[143] viewed the Islamic State as preferable to other would-be militant power-brokers in the region, particularly the militias from nearby Misrata. Finally, the social networks and institutions that had kept communities resilient in their resistance to the Islamic State's permanent implantation in Derna—tribal affiliations, educational institutions, and political activism—were comparatively weaker in Sirte, and thus less capable of serving as bulwarks of opposition.[144] Together, these conditions conspired to make Sirte ripe for the Islamic State's taking: following the Islamic State's ouster from Derna in 2015, Sirte was soon to become the next headquarters for the Islamic State in Libya.

Over the course of the spring of 2015—as the Islamic State was losing Derna—the Islamic State made independent attempts at the takeover of Sirte. In February 2015, IS members in Sirte, as a part of the broader Wilayat Tarabulus/Tripolitania, began to take over several municipal buildings in the city and declared that funds belonging to the previous municipal government now belonged to the Islamic State.[145] It soon occupied the Ouagadougou Center (a convention hall where various IS videos were subsequently produced), a hospital (called Ibn Sina), and a radio station,[146] which, during the weekend of February 7–8, 2015, began relaying IS sermons to residents.[147] A soldier told a *New York Times* reporter that during a trip to Sirte in late February or early March 2015, all four radio stations broadcasting in the city had ceased playing music and transmitted only Islamic sermons.[148]

Upon entering Sirte, the Islamic State was able to set the ground rules for its occupation. In a document that might be likened to a social contract, IS members circulated a "Charter for the City," as ISIS/ISIL and the Islamic State had done when its affiliates entered cities in Iraq and Syria in 2014. The charter contained thirteen points, outlining the behaviors that were and were not deemed appropriate for the citizens of Sirte. Among others, the charter banned "all taboos"—the sale or consumption of drugs, alcohol, and

smoking. It banned any symbols of the Libyan state—the secular antithesis of rule under sharia law—including flags, insignia, secular monuments, and the existence of political parties. It also declared that all funds that were once public were henceforth under the control of the Islamic State. Thieves in Sirte, the Charter noted, would face amputation. And, while the Islamic State instituted these changes, its Charter for the City promised all citizens of Sirte that the "people under our rule are safe and sound."[149]

Once installed as the de facto authorities in Sirte, the Islamic State extended its authority and rule to touch—and often to remake—sundry norms and institutions within the city. At its core, the Islamic State's governance model was founded upon a strict legal and judicial system. The Islamic State's judiciary, or Diwan al-Qada wa al-Mazalim,[150] sought to assume the administrative and bureaucratic responsibilities of a functioning municipal government. It issued drivers' licenses under the Islamic State's name,[151] instituted a system of transfer fees for the sale of automobiles,[152] and oversaw matters ranging from real estate transactions to marriage contracts.[153]

The Islamic State in Sirte also acted like a state when it came to the collection of taxes. In addition to imposing a *zakat*, or obligatory religious tax which normally amounts to 2.5 percent of wealth, it also began generating income through more traditional means. It taxed shop owners throughout 2015, attempting, according to one Sirte citizen named Ahmed, to retroactively collect "back taxes." From farmers living in and near Sirte, the Islamic State demanded one out of every ten sheep and one out of every five camels as a *zakat* tax to help support the new state's functioning.[154] Nor was the Islamic State sloppy in its bookkeeping: the UN's Libyan Panel of Experts found that it kept meticulous records[155] of the income from its taxation system, offering one man, Ahmed al-Niran al-Warfalli, for instance, a receipt for having paid his monthly taxes.[156] In the broader banking and financial sector, the Islamic State in Sirte shut down all banks, save one, which was accessible only to its own members.[157]

Faced with the rise of the Islamic State in Sirte, citizens, when possible, attempted to flee. While wealthy families, in particular, sought to leave,[158] others were stopped on their way out of the city by roadblocks and had their cars searched by Libyan as well as Chadian and Tunisian fighters of the Islamic State. Those trying to leave Sirte were forced to discard any

provisions—gas cylinders, cooking utensils, and even furniture—that might be helpful to the Islamic State.[159] In total, an estimated 85 percent of Sirte's population evacuated the city during the Islamic State's occupation.[160]

In the early days of the Islamic State's presence in Sirte, there were groups that tried to dislodge it, but they failed to do so. In March 2015, a unit of Libyan fighters from Brigade 166 of Misrata—one of the rival factions attempting to gain control of Sirte—was sent to oust the Islamic State from Sirte, but remained on the outskirts of the city.[161] Although the 166 Brigade would fight against the Islamic State between March and May 2015, it ultimately withdrew, thereby inspiring and emboldening the Islamic State.[162]

In its establishment of control over Sirte, the Islamic State also focused on seizing critical infrastructure and resources. By May 2015, the Islamic State had taken over Sirte's al-Qardabiya airbase from Libya Dawn, a coalition of various pro-Islamist militias associated with the GNC.[163] That same month, IS members in Sirte also took over the Great Man-Made River Project, an extensive irrigation system bringing water from coastal cities to Libya's Saharan interior, which Qaddafi had once hailed as the "eighth wonder of the world."[164] By June 2015, the Islamic State took over Sirte's power plant, giving it effective control over the city.[165] To cap the physical occupation of Sirte, the Islamic State also sought a declaration of its victory from local authorities: its members raided homes of municipal officials and coerced them into admitting that the Islamic State was in control of Sirte,[166] while across the city it began flying the Black Standard.[167] By August 2015, the Islamic State occupied the entirety of Sirte.[168] Misratan militias, including the 166 Brigade, citing a lack of support, largely withdrew from Sirte, allowing the Islamic State to quickly move to occupy much of the 200-kilometer coastal strip east of Sirte.[169] Soon, the approximately 1,500 IS fighters of Sirte set to work building a proto-state.

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Rules and Punishments under the Islamic State in Sirte

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Sirte, Libya
July 2015–December 2016

With the Islamic State installed by fall 2015, life in Sirte began to change: besides the bureaucratic administration of the new state, IS members instituted various new codes of conduct, adherence to which was overseen by its *Hisbah*, or morality police.[170] Led in Sirte by a man assumed to be a Sudanese national,[171] the *Hisbah* would ensure that no indulgences counter to its wishes took place. Those listening to music, smoking, or drinking alcohol were subjected to verbal and physical threats, in addition to fines and, in some instances, flogging.[172] One video produced by the Islamic State showed its fighters burning a bonfire of forbidden vices like hookah pipes and cigarettes, before encircling a collection of drum kits and breaking them with sledgehammers.[173] The Islamic State forbade the smoking of *shisha* pipes in cafes, a long-held tradition,[174] took down satellite dishes to prevent Libyans from viewing immoral Western television,[175] and ordered the destruction of shrines depicting Libyans' victories over Italians in the 20th century.[176] For those that did not follow its rules, the Islamic State constructed three prisons inside Sirte.[177]

In addition to monitoring and prohibiting indulgence in vices, the *Hisbah* were also tasked with ensuring that citizens actively participated in religious activities. Beginning in approximately August 2015, the *Hisbah* patrolled the streets of Sirte during the hours of Islamic prayer, five times throughout the day, and enforced religious observance, compelling shopkeepers to close their stores[178] and ushering bystanders into mosques, all under the threat of flogging for failure to comply.[179] Later, beginning in March 2016, the *Hisbah* began targeting Sirte's men over the age of fifteen, obliging them to undertake mandatory two-week religious training at local mosques, again under the threat of violence.[180] It destroyed shrines, particularly Sufi shrines, which it viewed as false idols.[181] Fortune tellers and charm sellers were labeled as heretics and punished.[182]

Perhaps the greatest hallmark of the Islamic State's rule in Sirte was the *Hisbah*'s reliance on extreme violence to punish those who failed to comply with its new social edicts. Whippings,[183] floggings, electric shocks,[184] executions, beheadings,[185] assassinations, and drive-by shootings became

commonplace. So too were abductions and forced disappearances.[186] The Islamic State featured in its propaganda videos images of its agents beating with canes those who had broken its laws. Others had their hands cut off.[187]

Indeed, the use of extreme, extralegal violence by the *Hisbah* has been well documented by human rights groups like Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group. Certain instances of violence have gained particular infamy. In Sirte, one such incident was the execution of Ahmed Abu Zumita. After he was accused of being a spy against the Islamic State, residents watched as his body was attached to a 20-foot black metal frame by his arms and legs and, after a cardboard sign was hung around his neck accusing him of being a spy for the 166 Brigade (the local anti-Islamic State militia), he was shot in the head. Crucified, his body remained in public view for the next three days.[188]

Other examples of such ultra-violence against citizens contravening the Islamic State's wishes soon became rife. One young man, Amjad bin Sasi, was killed in December 2015 by the Islamic State for cursing by taking Allah's name in vain, during a fight with a neighbor.[189] The Islamic State in Sirte was also particularly well known for its beheadings. In October 2015, it beheaded two elderly men—Adel Hafez, in his fifties, and Saed al-Ma'dani, in his seventies—the first public beheadings under the Islamic State's rule in Libya.[190] Their executions, which were detailed in a subsequent IS propaganda video, showed that the two were accused of sorcery, in addition to adultery and drinking.[191] In another example of its extreme violence, two men were lashed and then imprisoned for smoking cigarettes in December 2015.[192]

So severe was the Islamic State in Sirte's violence that some of the incidents reached global news cycles. The most notable of these was the February 2015 killing of twenty-one Coptic Christians (twenty of whom were Egyptian),[193] who had been in Sirte working on construction projects. The workers were abducted during two raids in December 2014 and January 2015 in retribution for "Muslim women persecuted by Coptic crusaders in Egypt," according to the video showing the executions.[194] Not only did the videos horrify viewers, but they suggested more significant collaboration between the IS members in Sirte and IS Central in Raqqa, Syria, than had been evidenced before.[195] The clues here were the use of

particular ceremonial knives, the high-quality production techniques reminiscent of the capabilities of IS Central,[196] and the prisoners' orange jumpsuits, a backhanded denigration of the Islamic State's enemies, as the jumpsuits were reminiscent of those worn by prisoners allegedly involved in the 9/11 attacks at the US prison in Guantanamo Bay.[197] In response, the Egyptian government began deploying airstrikes against the Islamic State in Libya.[198]

In addition to the *Hisbah* police, the Islamic State monitored adherence to its new rules through an extensive network of informal and undercover spies, informants, and moles, responsible for the rendition of suspected rule-breakers. Residents of Sirte reported the pervasive presence of informal undercover IS spies: while not presenting themselves as representatives of the Islamic State, they would nevertheless monitor citizens' adherence to the new rules, reporting back to the Islamic State when infractions occurred.[199] Ordinary people, government officials (especially police and intelligence officials), or fighters in local militias in and around Sirte who denounced the Islamic State's presence were all subjected to violence.[200] Particularly vulnerable were those believed to be spying on the Islamic State for the Libyan government, the international community, or the rival 166 Brigade.[201] Some residents of Sirte reported the presence of masked IS fighters entering homes and abducting citizens from their beds in the middle of the night.[202] In its May 2016 report, Human Rights Watch detailed the existence of the Islamic State's "kill list," a roster of some 130 people earmarked for tracking down and killing.[203]

Another particularly notable example of opposition to the Islamic State's occupation of Sirte occurred in August 2015. Prior to that month, the Islamic State had killed a popular Salafist imam, or preacher, in Sirte named Khalid bin Rajab Ferjani, who had refused to pledge allegiance to al-Baghdadi or allow the Islamic State to take control of the Cordoba Mosque, over which he presided. After the Islamic State assassinated Ferjani, members of the cleric's tribe, also called the Ferjani, retaliated by killing two senior IS commanders—Egyptian Abu Hammam Masri and Saudi Abu Huzaifa Ansari—and urged the citizens of Sirte to resist the Islamic State's deepening presence. The retribution from the Islamic State was swift and brutal. Within days, it killed more than forty Ferjani civilians,[204] including

two children and four elderly persons.[205] Twelve of them were beheaded.[206] Most distressingly, it crucified four members of the Ferjani tribe at a busy traffic circle in the Sirte, leaving the bodies to hang for days as a warning to other tribes that might seek to challenge its rule.[207] The rebellion against the Islamic State was brutally suppressed in only three days.[208]

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The Islamic State Central's Influence in Sirte

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Sirte, Libya
July 2015–December 2016

At the height of its members' penetration into Sirte, IS Central achieved tangible benefits from the Libyan *wilayat* and vice versa. In an interview published in the Islamic State's *Dabiq* magazine in September 2015, al-Qahtani explained why Libya was an important battleground in IS grand strategy:

> Libya has great importance for the Muslim *umma* [global community] because it is in Africa and south of Europe. It also contains a well of resources [oil] that cannot dry. All Muslims have a right to these resources. It is also a gate to the African desert stretching to a number of African countries. It is important to note also that the Libyan resources are a concern for the *kafir* West due to their reliance upon Libya for a number of years especially with regard to oil and gas. The control of the Islamic State over this region will lead to economic breakdowns especially for Italy and the rest of the European states.

With the takeover, Wilayat Tarabulus/Tripolitania more broadly and the city of Sirte more specifically took on prominent new roles in the Islamic State's global project, serving as the central command and control hub for its expansion into North and West Africa. Not only was Libya increasingly known as a haven where fighters from the Islamic State's Iraq and Syria-

based caliphate might go should they find themselves in trouble, but Sirte further served as the central node for IS in Africa. According to some analyses, the Islamic State in Sirte was credited with facilitating the Islamic State's activities in other provinces, including Wilayat Sinai (Egypt, chapter 4) and the IS West Africa Province (Lake Chad, chapter 6).[209] It also reached into various African countries, including Sudan, from which it recruited medical students to serve as doctors in Sirte.[210]

Especially throughout 2015, what was notable about the Islamic State's takeover of Sirte—as with Derna—was the extent to which it was overseen by IS State Central, and managed, both remotely and on the ground, by non-Libyan forces. In addition to IS Central's dispatch of a prominent IS cleric, Turki al-Binali, to Sirte in February 2015 to grow support for an IS presence there,[211] and the arrival of a seventeen-person cell in Sirte in August 2015,[212] the broader internationalized IS presence came to be felt there. As Nuri al-Mangoush, the owner of a trucking com-pany, told a *New York Times* reporter of the Islamic State's occupation of Sirte: "The entire Islamic State government [here] is from abroad—they are the ones who are calling the shots."[213] As anecdotal evidence of this, the *New York Times* interviewed two of the truck drivers from al-Mangoush's company, based in Misrata, 170 miles from Sirte, who were captured by the Islamic State in October 2015 and imprisoned as hostages in Sirte. To their surprise, their captors were not Libyan, but instead had the accents of Iraqis, Tunisians, Yemenis, Egyptians, and Sudanese.[214] Once taken back to an IS prison in Sirte, the truck drivers were also surprised to see that members of the Islamic State in Sirte all bowed to a *wali*, or administrator, of Saudi origin, whom the IS Central had sent to Sirte, and who, when drones or airstrikes were heard overhead, would have his cell phone confiscated and be ushered away to safety.[215] Even more powerful than the Saudi *wali*, the imprisoned truck drivers would report, was an Iraqi troop commander. While in captivity, they also met a Chadian. (As for other Africans in Sirte, neighboring Tunisians were the primary foreign fighters, though sub-Saharan Africans from Kenya, Senegal, Mali, and Nigeria were also present there.)[216] While in captivity, the truck drivers were forced to watch footage of the Islamic State's attacks around the world, in Iraq and Syria, and also in Egypt.[217] Underscoring the transnationality of the group, by July 2018, the leader of the Islamic State in Libya was Abu Moaz al-Tikriti, who, as

his name suggests, was an Iraqi, not a Libyan, national.[218] While some of these foreigners had shown up in the Libyan theater of their own accord, others were explicitly directed there by IS Central itself.

One of the more notable ways in which IS Central made its presence felt in Libya was through the tactical innovations that the emirs it sent from Syria and Iraq brought to the provinces. As Don Rassler has described it, one of the Islamic State's main sources of success has been its ability to innovate tactically, including through the use of drones. In March 2015, for instance, IS–Libya released surveillance footage of an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) on Twitter, which suggested that the footage had been used to help determine the target for a suicide bombing. While the IS groups in Libya have historically not been known to use weaponized drones, but only surveillance drones, its mere possession of them breaks the Western coalition's monopoly on the airspace, in addition to giving the group propaganda benefits.[219] A second tactic that IS–Libya adopted from IS Central in the Iraq campaign was the use of tunnels to facilitate the movement of fighters from place to place, undetected by aerial surveillance.[220] Indeed, one notable sign of the IS Central's presence in Libya was that as soon as IS–Libya took over a place—even before exerting full control—its fighters would often start digging tunnels.[221]

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Changing Social Norms under the Islamic State in Sirte

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Sirte, Libya
July 2015–December 2016

Not only did the Islamic State's takeover of Sirte in early 2015 see it attempt to manage the bureaucratic institutions of a proto-city-state and enforce its dictates through often brutal punishments, but it went several steps further. Based on its interpretation of sharia, the Islamic State sought to penetrate much more deeply into the lives of Sirte's citizens, regulating even their most mundane activities, behaviors, and social interactions,

attempting to replicate, as nearly as it could, what its parent group was concurrently doing in Iraq and Syria.

Gender roles under the Islamic State's rule in Sirte soon became highly regulated, with men, and especially women, facing profound constraints on behavior, dress, and participation in the public sphere. When it came to appropriate clothing, men endured far fewer restrictions than women. The Islamic State regulated the length of men's pants,[222] while barbers were forbidden to trim men's beards.[223]

Life for women under the Islamic State in Sirte became much more restrictive. While dress in Sirte had historically been modest, it became hyper-conservative under the Islamic State, which specified exactly how women should dress, should there be any doubt. A billboard in downtown Sirte demanded that women wear a black, simple *niqab*, and that these garments should cover the whole body, being loose and thick for maximum coverage; women's clothing must not "attract attention," "resemble the clothing of female infidels and men," "be scented with cologne or incense," or "be extravagant or celebrity-like."[224]

Beyond dress, the Islamic State also instituted a rule that when leaving their homes, women were required to be escorted by a *mahram*, a male relative such as a father or brother.[225] As a result, many women reported no longer being able to work.[226] When they did leave their houses, women were expected to be fully covered, faces included.[227] Unsurprisingly, women reported being confined to their houses for fear of punishment for insufficient adherence to rules; others stayed home for fear of abduction and forced servitude.[228]

Interviewers from Human Rights Watch were told that the Islamic State banned the sale of perfume in stores, as well as plastic mannequins. The topic of women's underwear became a flashpoint. The *Hisbah* banned the sale of "ornate or frilly underwear." It also closed lingerie stores.[229] One woman in Sirte lamented that women's underwear had become so regulated that the Islamic State had set up particular stores in which it sold only approved styles of undergarments.[230]

The punishments for disobeying the dress code were brutal, and often befell the husbands of women guilty of infractions: as the overseers of women, men were expected to regulate women's adherence to the Islamic State's code of decorum. As one woman named "Huda" told Human Rights

Watch: "We had to cover everything including our faces. If you show your hands, they fine your husband 75 dinars [US$58]. If you show your feet, it's 150 dinars [$116]. The second time it happens they give the husband a warning. The third time it happens, they whip him."[231] Others spoke of taking excessive measures to conceal their bodies—both women and girls—to avoid having their husbands, fathers, or male relatives punished.[232]

The Islamic State also inserted itself into the very institution of marriage. In addition to keeping lists of marriage contracts within the group,[233] the Islamic State politicized the institution of marriage itself, exhorting fathers to bestow their daughters on IS fighters, and encouraging women to divorce their husbands if they were in the Libyan Army, and only remarry them if they renounced allegiance to the secular Libyan state and swore allegiance to the Islamic State.[234] However, several Libyans, like 23-year-old Mosbah Zarga, who worked as a hairdresser in Sirte, were emphatic that the Islamic State never forced women to marry its soldiers, nor did they hold women as sex slaves, as had been done elsewhere under the Islamic State's rule in Iraq and Syria.[235] This situation in Sirte differs from accounts from the Islamic State's presence in Derna. Here, women's rights activist Asma Said reported that her team of doctors had found that the prevalence of child marriage in Derna had increased fifteen-fold (with girls as young as 12 marrying) since the return of members of the Battar Brigade in late 2013.[236] The result of these child and teen marriages, according to the doctors, was an increased prevalence of sexually transmitted infections, miscarriages, and stillbirths.[237] As one doctor who worked on the study said, "The [wives of IS soldiers] come into the [gynecological] clinic playing with their dolls."[238] In some cases, parents themselves gave up their children to (often non-Libyan) members of the Islamic State as a means of making money, seeking protection, or, as one person reported, "getting nice cars and nice houses."[239]

Particularly severe punishments were meted out if a citizen was homosexual.[240] The ultraconservative Islamic State had no tolerance for the possibility of same-sex relationships. One incident occurred in October 2016, in the town of Ben Jawad in the broader Sirte district. Residents were forced to watch as a man accused of being a homosexual was thrown off of the roof of the highest building in town by members of the Islamic State.[241]

Even children's lives under the rule of the Islamic State in Sirte became severely restricted. While it allowed schools to remain open, it altered the curriculum to fit its worldview and got rid of more secular subjects, particularly history classes. They took up quizzing children on the finer points of Islam: how to perform the morning prayer, how to wrap a *hijab*, and, who the caliph of the Islamic State was.[242] In March 2016, the Islamic State ran a seminar specifically to help children understand its theology.[243]

Residents of Sirte also reported that children's class sizes had shrunk during the Islamic State's rule. While many had fled Sirte, leading to an overall population decline, other parents pulled their children out of IS-run schools for fear of indoctrination.[244] Others noted that the Islamic State would send "enforcers" to check on students—keeping an eye on classroom practices by peering through the windows of classrooms, according to one woman—to ensure that politics were not discussed and that dress codes, even for children, were adhered to. Children who disobeyed were sometimes taken to the headquarters of the *Hisbah*.[245]

As with adult women, girls suffered in specific ways. While normally excluded from stringent codes of modesty, girls as young as ten were made to cover themselves entirely in an unadorned black *abaya* outside the confines of their homes.[246] Residents reported that certain schools barred girls from attending at all. In other places, girls could attend only if they were fully veiled. Some parents stopped sending their children to school altogether for fear of their daughters' abduction by the Islamic State.[247]

Beyond simply indoctrinating children, the Islamic State began to operationalize children in the course of its violence, sometimes after having kidnapped them. Notably, in Sirte, it was known to abduct children and induct them into its fighting forces. In February 2016, for instance, the Islamic State held a graduation ceremony for an estimated eighty-five youths of Sirte—all under the age of 16—after training them in courses on "suicide bombing, booby trapping, and weapons use."[248] There are other reports of the use of children as human shields.[249] In one searing revelation, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) detailed the stories two boys, aged 10 and 14, who had been kidnapped by the Islamic State in Libya, and were then forced to train in weapons use and study religion, in addition to being coerced into watching videos of IS beheadings. One of the boys reported that he had become the cadet of a non-Libyan foreign fighter,

responsible for cleaning his kit and bringing him food, in addition to regularly being subjected to sexual violence. The boy told the UNHRC that most nights "I knew what I had to do, I had to take my clothes off and turn around and bend over facing the wall."[250]

And yet, for all the upheavals that Islamic State brought to Sirte, its members sought to convey, both domestically and internationally, that life not only carried on in the city, but that its rule was benevolent and its governance an improvement on what had existed before. Instead of a place of chaos and brutality, the Islamic State sought to attract recruits to Sirte by presenting it as a functioning city to which it had brought calm and order. On March 6, 2016, for instance, the Islamic State released a film about the very ordinariness of life within its statelet in Sirte. The video showed citizens going about their normal activities of beekeeping and shepherding; a car dealership was operating normally; and members of the new government kept the city tidy by trimming the trees.[251] With such a focus on daily civilian life, the Islamic State's presence in Sirte in many ways resembled those of its parent group in Iraq and Syria. It also called for professionals such as lawyers, doctors, and engineers to settle there.[252] In Sirte, as in in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State exhorted Muslims from around the world to enter its caliphate not as a place to die as a fighter, but instead as a place to live under the divine rule of sharia.

Moreover, though the Islamic State was brutal towards those that opposed its rule, those who accepted its presence were treated with some modicum of decorum, if not respect. Members of Islamic State would often pay fair prices for the goods they took—one shopkeeper told of a $400 purchase at his furniture store—and would give alms to orphans, especially at the end of Ramadan.[253] So seemingly robust was the Islamic State's rule in Sirte that some observers opined that it could replace Raqqa or Mosul as the capital of IS operations.[254]

And yet, despite its wide-ranging efforts to portray itself as benevolent and competent, not only was life under IS rule brutal, but its governance was often ineffective. In addition to the inherent lack of human rights and respect for basic freedoms—of religion, association, movement, and protection under the rule of law, among others—even the more bureaucratic functions of the pseudo-state that did exist often broke down. Residents complained that there was never any food in grocery stores.[255] Prices for

daily staples rose, while commodities available for purchase diminished.[256] Healthcare was poor: the Islamic State segregated male and female medical staff,[257] and medicine was not available in hospitals.[258] Hospitals themselves in Sirte were abandoned, and citizens had to seek medical attention outside the city.[259] Gas shortages were also commonplace: residents were expected to smuggle in their own fuel from outside Sirte, though risked having the Islamic State confiscate it.[260] Instead of administering a state for the benefit of citizens, the Islamic State ran Sirte for the benefit of its own fighters,[261] which, at their height, were estimated to number to as many as 5,000.[262]

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Retreat

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Sirte, Libya
2016

By late 2016, the Islamic State's hold on Sirte began to loosen. Led by the United Nations-backed GNA,[263] and supported by US forces under Operation Odyssey Lightning,[264] a coalition of Libyan fighters primarily from the nearby city of Misrata began an attempt to wrest control of Sirte away from the Islamic State in April 2016. This coalition, known as Bunyan al-Marsous, was composed predominantly of Islamic armed groups; it was hastily created in April 2016 in response to the Islamic State's attempt to attack and capture Misrata.[265] Additionally, in early August 2016, the United States launched a series of airstrikes against the Islamic State in Sirte, conducting nearly thirty in the first ten days of August alone.[266] By August 10, 2016, these troops had retaken the Ouagadougou Center, which had served as the Islamic State's primary base, marking a significant symbolic loss,[267] as well as the city's main hospital, Ibn Sina.[268] From August 1 to December 5, 2016, the US conducted at least 470 airstrikes against the Islamic State in Sirte.[269]

In response, the Islamic State fought desperately, though it sustained significant losses. Several senior Islamic State leaders were killed. So seemingly desperate had the Islamic State in Sirte become that it used women—a historically interdicted though contemporarily debated practice—in its violent operations, allowing them to serve as both snipers and suicide bombers.[270] As the fight wore on, with GNA troops surrounding Sirte by November 2016, IS fighters began to use extreme measures, including laying mines and booby traps, and using civilians as shields.[271] And, despite its competence in using tactical innovations to hold off coalition forces for a significant amount of time, "In Sirte, the only tactical innovation that could have helped IS withstand U.S. airstrikes would have been the development of a nuclear weapon in a basement in Sirte."[272] By December 6, 2016, Sirte had been reclaimed by the coalition forces, and the Islamic State was said to be "fully" defeated there.[273] The death toll incurred during the recapture of this territory was substantial. An estimated 2,500 IS affiliates in Libya lost their lives, while some 700 GNA were killed, and some 3,000 to 4,000 more were injured.[274]

And yet the loss of Sirte apparently came as no surprise to the IS militants. With the writing on the wall, they began fleeing south into the Libyan Sahara, into Wilayat Fezzan. Even before the loss of Sirte, the emir of the Islamic State in Benghazi, Abu Mus'ab al-Farouq, reported that the head of Wilayat Tarabulus/Tripolitania had already fled south into the desert, into Wilayat Fezzan.[275] For its part, Islamic State had staged large-scale assaults in April 2016 as a smokescreen to allow its senior leaders to escape the city.[276]

While Libyan security forces attempted to put a cordon around Sirte to prevent IS-affiliated members from fleeing, many likely slipped out of the city, using ancient trade and smuggling routes south through the Sahara to evade arrest.[277] When anti-IS forces took over a school that the Islamic State had previously occupied, they found evidence of fleeing jihadis: sinks full of hair, a sign that the jihadis had shaved off their long beards in an attempt to blend in with the comparatively more secular community.[278] Ejected from Sirte, the Islamic State in Libya regrouped in the Libyan Saharan desert, in Wilayat Fezzan,[279] seeking to rebuild its forces after a

lightning rise, takeover, and fall in one of the 21st century's most profoundly failed states.

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A Fall from Prominence

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Libya
2017–2019

Following its ejection from Sirte in December 2016, and despite evidence of its lingering presence, the Islamic State in Libya has since been, as Aaron Zelin describes it, a "shadow of its former self."[280] Strategically, IS–Libya went from being a group that sought to hold and rule territory—as IS Central had done in Iraq and Syria—to one that was concerned with spoiling the rebuilding of the Libyan national polity, including disrupting the oil industry and preventing political reconciliation.[281]

Those less ambitious goals were reflected in its operations: the widespread violence once associated with the Islamic State in Libya saw a precipitous decline. Following its ouster from Sirte, it conducted only four attacks in Libya in 2017.[282] The following year saw an increased, though still subdued, tempo, including a May 2018 attack on the High National Elections Commission of Libya in Tripoli, killing at least twelve, with dual suicide bombers,[283] followed by a September 2018 operation in which IS militants attacked the National Oil Corporation in Tripoli, killing two and injuring ten.[284] The year 2019 saw an even starker decline in its violence: before al-Baghdadi's death in October, the Islamic State in Libya had not claimed a single attack over the previous five months,[285] and it had released only four video messages during the three previous years.[286]

Territorially, too, the Islamic State in Libya at al-Baghdadi's death had become a ghost of its former glory. Once composed of three *wilayat*—Cyrenaica/Barqa, Tarabulus/Tripolitania, and Fezzan—IS Central had consolidated its Libyan territories by the time of al-Baghdadi's death, only recognizing one greatly reduced Wilayat Libya. This decision—though

more a byproduct of the broader process of IS Central bureaucratic restructuring rather than a direct response to the Libyan group's local decline—captured its diminished capability more generally. Though its fighters that had survived the sieges of Sirte were believed to be interspersed throughout the metropolitan areas, best intelligence suggests that the Islamic State's primary fighting forces had fled into the Libyan desert and were regrouping in the erstwhile Fezzan province. Its fighter numbers—once estimated at their peak to number 5,000—by mid-2018 numbered only 500.[287]

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The Islamic State in Libya at the Time of al-Baghdadi's Death

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Libya
October 2019

By the time of al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019, the Islamic State in Libya had contracted in nearly every conceivable way since its one-time pinnacle between 2014 and 2016. Indicative of the group's decline from its one-time prominence was its slow reaffirmation to IS Central following both the fall of Baghouz in March 2019 and al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019. Though IS in Libya had once been the strongest IS presence outside Iraq and Syria, its confirmation pledge of allegiance to al-Baghdadi after the fall of Baghouz was among the last of the "And the [Best] Outcome Is for the Righteous" video series to be published, being released on July 6, 2019.[288] Similarly, after al-Baghdadi's death, Wilayat Libya's pledge to Islamic State's new caliph, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, came nearly two weeks after other global *wilayat* reaffirmed their pledges, on November 15, 2019.[289] The African affiliate that had at one time maintained the closest operational relationship with IS Central was now either so weak or so disconnected that critical media releases took weeks to arrive in the IS Central's media outlets.

While the experience of the Islamic State's presence in Libya was, at its height, the apogee of the "success" of the group on the continent, the

experiences of the provinces there nevertheless followed a general pattern similar—though in more extreme ways—to that of other IS provinces on the continent. During the pre-*bayah* period, the Islamic State's global emergence served to democratize jihad in Libya. Given the pre-existence of a wide network of al-Qaeda supporters—though without an official al-Qaeda branch analogous to AQIM or al-Shabaab—the rise of the Islamic State allowed jihadists to align themselves with global poles of power pursuing agendas commensurate with their interests. The mixture of Libyan state collapse, various locales' long-standing sympathies with the global jihadist movement, infusions of IS-sympathetic fighters from Syria, outreach and governance from Ansar al-Sharia, and IS Central's global rise and courting of Libya led different actors to feel confident in leaving the al-Qaeda orbit to join the Islamic State.

In the *bayah* period, the process of affiliate utility validation was easily accomplished in Libya. This was in contrast to other locations around the continent where pledges of *bayat* would take months or years to receive acceptance. It was no surprise, therefore, given that IS Central had long eyed Libya as an ideal satellite and, by September 2014, had begun to send emissaries to help found its Libyan province, that it eventually recognized three provinces there.

In the post-*bayah* period, the Islamic State's *wilayat* across Libya would fit the mold of sovereign subordination to IS Central, even though, when compared with nearly every other African province, the groups initially received much more direct support from their parent group. Notably, the relative "success" of IS in Libya was aided by IS Central's sending of advisors and financial transfers, as well as by exhortations from IS Central that fighters should return to Libya. And yet, as much as IS Central would work to establish satellites in Libya, there were limits to its support. Though Libya received relatively more assistance and guidance from IS Central than other African provinces, its operations, day-to-day functioning, and tendencies of governance, though certainly informed and inspired by IS Central, were only occasionally directed from above. Instead, the local context, affiliations, and exigencies guided its evolution.

And thus, at least for a time, while the Islamic State's presence in Libya was preeminent in size, scope, governance, and infamy, next door in Algeria, a far less successful IS province was struggling—and failing—to survive.

3

THE ISLAMIC STATE IN ALGERIA

PART ONE
THE PRE-BAYAH PERIOD

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A Cancelled Election and the Rise and Evolution of Algerian Militancy

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Northern Algeria
December 1991–Summer 2014

The origins of the Islamic State's Algerian province—Wilayat al-Jazair—may be said to lie in Algeria's civil war of the 1990s. Ahead of the completion of what would have been Algeria's first multi-party legislative elections since independence from France in 1962, a challenger Islamist party—the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS)—looked poised to beat the incumbent party, the National Liberation Front (FLN),[1] which had waged Algeria's war of independence against France from 1954 to 1962 and had ruled Algeria ever since.

For its part, the FIS had emerged in the late 1980s as an Islamist opposition to the long-standing rule of the FLN. Despite having been the principal nationalist and independence-seeking movement in the Algerian independence struggle, by the 1980s the FLN had grown stagnant and corrupt, dominated by party members from the east of the country and closely tied to the military. In response to this perceived stagnation, the FIS emerged and gained followers for its advocacy of a mixture of Islamist puritanism combined with business-friendly economic liberalization.[2]

With the FLN having lost significantly during the first round of voting in December 1991,[3] the party moved quickly to prevent the widely presumed result of another FIS victory and its overwhelming dominance in the People's National Assembly, the lower house of the Algerian parliament. In light of the impending loss for the ruling FLN, the Algerian military canceled the second round of the electoral process scheduled for 16 January 1992, only days before it was to take place.[4]

After the military annulled the elections in January 1992 and then forced the sitting, pro-reform president, Chadli Bendjedid, to resign, security forces began arresting tens of thousands of opposition and Islamist-leaning FIS members and activists.[5] Two months later the FIS was banned outright. In response, some of its supporters opted for armed action against the state. While some anti-government Islamist armed groups had already formed in the hills south of Algiers in summer 1991,[6] thousands of young men—among them some of the 2,800 Algerians who had gone to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets during the 1980s[7]—joined their compatriots after the crackdown to launch a rural guerrilla insurgency against the Algerian state. By March 1992, this array of groups—comprising a significant number of small cells, each with its own leader, areas of operation, and imams—had coalesced under the umbrella of the Armed Islamic Movement (MIA) operating under the nominal leadership of Abdelkader Chebouti, though his command and control over the approximately 22,000 fighters in total remained limited.[8]

Towards the end of 1992, nearly a year after the electoral process had been annulled, more radical splinter factions of the MIA returned to Algeria's urban areas to wage a campaign of violence. Collectively calling themselves the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), these urban insurgents began to utilize brutal terror tactics against not only the Algerian state but also

those ordinary citizens that they deemed insufficiently pious. In March 1993, a campaign of assassinations by the GIA began, targeting journalists, Algeria's francophone middle class, and foreigners,[9] and by the mid-1990s the GIA had become the most powerful armed group fighting the Algerian state. The GIA became particularly notorious for its massacres of hundreds of civilians on the *takfirist* pretext that all those who failed to join its Islamist struggle were themselves "unbelievers" and thus were as much targets for the GIA's violence as the Algerian state itself.[10] In one instance, during the night of September 22–23, 1997, as many as 417 civilians were massacred in Bentalha;[11] a few weeks before that, on August 28, 1997, almost 300 people were killed in the town of Rais.[12]

In response, the GIA's terror campaign provoked not only a brutal counterinsurgency campaign by the Algerian government, but also inter-factional fighting between the GIA and the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS),[13] a restructuring of MIA units which had since become the official armed wing of the FIS.[14] The Algerian civil war—also referred to as *la sale guerre*, or dirty war—waged roughly between 1991 and 2002, pitted the Algerian state against this constellation of armed factions, and would ultimately lead to the deaths of as many as 200,000 Algerians. Eventually, a combination of government crackdowns and amnesties, Islamist infighting, and general exhaustion on all sides brought about a broad cessation of fighting by 2002. Following his election in 1999, the new Algerian president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, hoping to restore a sense of normalcy after nearly a decade of violence, instituted an amnesty plan for militants known as the *concorde civile*.

By the end of the 1990s, the insurgency had lost most of its momentum as armed groups accepted the *concorde civile* and more radical GIA commanders were killed. For its part, AIS accepted the terms soon after they were announced, and GIA leader Antar Zouabri was killed in February 2002. As AIS repudiated armed action and GIA faltered under desertion and military pressure, dissident GIA commanders formed yet another armed group—the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC)—to continue the struggle that others had renounced. Formed in 1998, the GSPC positioned itself as opposed to the GIA's brutal attacks against civilians—including the Rais and Bentalha massacres of 1997—which many members blamed as the source of its failure. Though there were lingering questions

about the Algerian military's role in such atrocities as "false flags," the reputational damage to the GIA was irreversible.[15] Instead the GSPC refocused its violence on military targets, while simultaneously rejecting the peace process that Bouteflika had initiated.[16]

From its very inception, the GSPC sought to deepen its relationship with al-Qaeda. Between 1998 and 2002, GSPC members had internal debates about the degree of affiliation that they should seek from Bin Laden and al-Qaeda, and during this time al-Qaeda representatives also visited Algeria. More overtly, in October 2003 GSPC's emir, Nabil Sahraoui, pledged allegiance to Bin Laden and al-Qaeda (as well as to Mullah Omar and the Taliban) on behalf of the GPSC. Between 2004 and 2006, ties deepened.[17] The culmination of this growing relationship between the GSPC and al-Qaeda in the late 1990s and early 2000s[18] came in September 2006 when GSPC publicly pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda. On September 11, 2006, AQ's deputy leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, made official the ties between al-Qaeda and GSPC.[19] Three days later, GSPC responded:

> We are glad to inform our Islamic nation and our Muslim brothers around the world about the great news which the mujahideen have been waiting for … the news of the merging of the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat in Algeria [GSPC] with al-Qaeda. We have decided to swear *bayah* to the Sheikh Osama bin Laden and to continue our jihad in Algeria as soldiers under his command, for him to use in the cause of Allah when and where he sees fit.[20]

In January 2007, GSPC formally took on the moniker of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM.[21]

By the late 2000s, AQIM, al-Qaeda's official branch in the Maghreb, was assumed to possess a fighting strength ranging from "several hundred" to over one thousand fighters.[22] The group committed attacks on military forces[23] and international peacekeepers,[24] kidnappings,[25] targeted killings,[26] and attacks on civilian infrastructure.[27] It showed a particular proclivity for abductions for ransom: AQIM's ability to use kidnappings for profit would lead US officials in 2012 to call it al-Qaeda's best-financed affiliate.[28] Embarking upon a regional expansion of operations, it reorganized its zones of operation into four distinct areas: Central (Algeria),

East (Tunisia), South (Sahel), and West (Mauritania).[29] It was from this "Central" sector of AQIM that Islamic State in Algeria would later emerge.

* * *

The Rearing of an Insurgent Leader

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Northern Algeria
1997–2014

The future leader of the Islamic State's Algeria Province, Abdelmalek Gouri, was at one stage a prominent member of AQIM. Born in 1977 in Si-Mustapha, a town in the Boumerdès province of Algeria some thirty miles east of Algiers,[30] Gouri joined the GIA in the early 1990s and fought as a member of the group until his arrest in 1997.[31] He was released from prison two years later in 1999,[32] under Bouteflika's *concorde civile*.

Following his release from prison in 1999, Gouri joined the GSPC,[33] which had been formed the year before. But as the GSPC suffered severe reversals at the hands of the Algerian military in the mid-2000s prior to its 2007 official rebranding as AQIM,[34] Gouri decided to travel to Lebanon. There, along with about twenty other Algerians, he briefly fought alongside a Salafist group called Fatah al-Islam in summer 2007 against the Lebanese military, vying for control of Tripoli's Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp. While Fatah al-Islam had originated as a parochial Palestinian jihadi outfit, by the time of Gouri's arrival it had evolved into a more explicitly internationalist group with ties to al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the predecessor of Islamic State.[35] After a grinding four-month campaign, the Lebanese military secured control of Nahr al-Bared following a breakout attempt that saw most of Fatah al-Islam's leaders escape in early September 2007. For his part, Gouri fled Lebanon in August 2007. Using fake papers and transiting through Damascus, he returned to Algeria.

Back in Algeria, Gouri went to the Kabylia region, where he assumed a role within the relatively newly formed AQIM. Located at the edge of Mediterranean and punctuated with deep valleys and dense forests, Kabylia

remained in some turmoil even as the violence of the 1990s receded across most of Algeria towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Instead, it experienced renewed bouts of violent protest which were, in turn, met with harsh responses by the security forces. As Martin Evans and John Phillips describe it, the situation in Kabylia resembled a "permanent standoff between the population and the forces of law and order throughout 1999 and 2000."[36] After he briefly fought alongside around a dozen Algerian veterans of the fighting in Lebanon in Lebanon,[37] Gouri formed AQIM's Katibat Arkam, a unit of some thirty men. Over time, Katibat Arkam became infamous for its disproportionate provision of suicide bombers,[38] carrying out a series of bombings in northern Algeria in 2011 that signaled a serious escalation of violence on the part of AQIM.[39]

For his part, Gouri's prominence within AQIM rose with that of his unit. By the early 2010s, he had effectively become AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel's deputy,[40] leading AQIM's "Central" sector of Algeria.[41] Despite his rising profile within AQIM, tensions soon developed between Gouri and Droukdel over AQIM's trajectory. Gouri grew dissatisfied with Droukdel's leadership and disagreed with him over how to pursue the increasingly difficult fight with security forces in northern Algeria. Believing Droukdel was presiding over AQIM's decline and was incapable of reversing it, Gouri thought himself the man to revive the insurgency in northern Algeria, perhaps by aligning with a transnational movement whose ideology was not predicated on the rejection of the GIA's bloody tactics, as AQIM's had become. Where Droukdel and AQIM had sought to minimize the brutality of the GIA, Gouri viewed a return to such an approach as possibly an answer to AQIM's decline.

The emergence of the Islamic State as a globally minded movement competing with al-Qaeda for the loyalty of affiliated insurgencies around the world would provide Gouri with precisely this opportunity. The potential for IS affiliation effectively "democratized" Algerian insurgents' options for transnational affiliation, offering ambitious commanders like Gouri and his colleagues the chance to sidestep Droukdel, return to less constrained modalities of violence, and become national insurgent leaders in their own right. Gouri's personal dissatisfaction with Droukdel's leadership, his own seeming ambition, and the concurrent rise of the Islamic State—to which AQIM had ties through its previous existence as AQI, and

with which Gouri may have established links during his time in Lebanon—offered a seemingly attractive alternative to AQIM's stagnation in northern Algeria and its pivot to the Sahara under Droukdel. The Islamic State appeared to offer precisely the hope for new direction that a battalion leader in northern Algeria's faltering insurgency might seek.

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PART TWO
THE BAYAH PERIOD

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Answering the Call

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Northern Algeria
July–September 2014

After the declaration of its caliphate in June 2014, one of the first signs of the Islamic State's ability to find purchase among members of the transnational jihadi movement in Africa occurred in Algeria. In an audiotape released on July 2, 2014,[42] Abu Abdallah Othman al-Asimi, a founding member of the GSPC[43] and the chief jurist for AQIM's "Central" sector (of which Gouri was part), addressed the "silence" with which most other al-Qaeda affiliates had greeted the announcement of the Islamic State's caliphate. Al-Asimi pledged that "we" would never abandon the "mujahideen of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant" and congratulated al-Baghdadi "for his clear triumph in Mosul, Samarra, and elsewhere." He also lauded IS for how it had "redesigned the map of the Islamic caliphate, sanctioned the victory of the oppressed, and ransomed the unfortunate."[44] Al-Asimi—whose real name was Bachir Kherza[45]—was born in 1974[46] in the Bab el-Oued district of Algiers and had been active during the Algerian civil war in the 1990s as part of the GIA.[47] Al-Asimi would soon gain prominence, briefly, within the future IS province.

While al-Asimi's July 2014 pledge of allegiance suggested the possibility of the Islamic State's expansion into Algeria, it remained unclear whether he indeed spoke for all of AQIM's "Central" sector or merely for himself. On September 13, 2014, however, a communiqué was released on IS media channels showing that, indeed, al-Asimi, Gouri, and assorted other militants in AQIM's Central sector had pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi. Calling themselves Jund al-Khilafa (JaK, or Soldiers of the Caliphate),[48] the militants condemned AQIM for "deviating from the true path" and, in a message directed at al-Baghdadi himself, Gouri stated: "You have in the Islamic Maghreb men [that] if you order them, they will obey you."[49] Though the initial pledge was recirculated on IS media channels, the elevation to full province was not complete. Instead, two weeks later, Jund al-Khilafa would make a much stronger statement.

* * *

Hervé Gourdel

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Kabylia region, Algeria
September 2014

On September 22, 2014, six hikers—five Algerians and one Frenchman—were traveling together in a car on a winding mountain road between the high, scrubby hilltops of a valley in Algeria's Djurdjura mountains, about a thousand meters above sea level. When the hikers approached the village of Ait Ouabane, at the base of a valley, a group of gunmen in military fatigues and masked with headscarves suddenly skittered down from the woody hillside, stopping the hikers' vehicle. After an initial exchange, words between the hikers and gunmen escalated into bouts of yelling. The masked men pulled the hikers from the vehicle, forcing them to walk into the Algerian hills that stretched before them. The hikers were herded through the terrain for nearly two kilometers, far from the road on which they had left their abandoned car. They eventually reached their final destination, a makeshift camp, where the militants, under the command of Gouri, began interrogating the hikers.

One of the hikers, a 55-year-old man with long-swept silver-gray hair and chiseled features, received special attention from the militants. Hervé Gourdel, the only non-Algerian in the group and the sole Frenchman, was the leader of the hikers. Having founded a France-based mountain trekking company in 1987, he had worked as a guide in the Mercantour National Park, in the Alps, north of his hometown of Nice.[50] An impassioned adventure-seeker and photographer, Gourdel had been leading treks through the Atlas Mountains of Morocco for nearly twenty years, in addition to training some of the first Moroccan hiking guides in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[51] That day, Gourdel was in Algeria, on his first return in decades, leading the group of hikers whose walk was not to unfold as planned.

The militants interrogated Gourdel and his colleagues at length. Fourteen hours of questioning and threats stretched over the afternoon and into the evening and night of that day. By that night, Gourdel's Algerian companions were released.[52] However, Gouri's followers had other plans for Gourdel. The militants threatened to kill him within twenty-four hours if France, Gourdel's country of birth, did not stop its campaign of airstrikes against the Islamic State, to which the militants had pledged allegiance just nine days before. (France had joined the air campaign against IS soon before Gourdel's kidnapping, under the auspices of Operation Chammal, launching a raid against a logistics depot in Mosul, Iraq.)[53] The plan of the Algerian militants was to force France to end its assault on their would-be parent group, using Gourdel's life as a bargaining chip.

The following day, September 23, 2014, the militants brought forward a camera, while Gourdel squatted between two of them. One began reading the group's prepared message:

> We are Jund al-Khilafa [soldiers of the caliphate] in the land of Algeria. We operate under the command of our caliph, Emir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. We give French president François Hollande twenty-four hours to halt his country's criminal aggression against Islamic State or we will slaughter Hervé Gourdel. If you want to preserve Gourdel's life, a formal statement must be issued ending your aggression against the Islamic State.[54]

It was Gourdel's turn to address France's president, François Hollande:

> Mr. President Hollande, I am Hervé Gourdel. I was born in France in 1959. I arrived in Algeria on September 20. I was kidnapped by the Algerian Jund al-Khilafa militant group on Sunday. This group is asking you not to intervene in Iraq … I appeal to you, Mr. President, do whatever you can to get me out of this bad situation.[55]

On September 24, 2014, the militants delivered their next message to France by publishing a video entitled "Message of Blood for the French Government." In desperation, Hervé Gourdel again addressed France's president: "Hollande, you have followed the donkey Obama." He then uttered his last words, expressing his love for his family: "Françoise, Erwann, Anouk, my parents, I love you." Next, a militant reaffirmed the group's fealty to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State before beheading Gourdel.[56] Al-Asimi was reportedly the executioner.[57]

Gourdel's execution marked the fourth beheading of a Westerner by the Islamic State, following those of American journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff in August and September 2014, respectively, and of British aid worker David Haines in September 2014.[58] However, it was the first time as far as is known that the group had used the macabre tactic outside Iraq and Syria.[59] From the time of his kidnapping to his murder, Gourdel was in captivity for no more than three days. His body was located four months later, booby-trapped by militants, approximately fifteen kilometers from the road where he and his clients had been kidnapped.[60] With his beheading, the Islamic State made its presence, however informal, definitively felt within Algeria.

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Becoming Wilayat al-Jazair

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Algeria
November 2014

The public murder of Gourdel in September 2014 by itself did not immediately lead to the formal recognition of Algeria's Jund al-Khilafa as

an official province of the Islamic State. Instead, Gouri's outfit gained official and public recognition, elevating it to the status of a *wilaya*, on November 13, 2014, when its presence was announced together with that of IS *wilayat* in Libya (chapter 2), Sinai (chapter 4), and Saudi Arabia and Yemen in the audio speech "Even if the Disbelievers Despise as Such."[61] IS Central referred to Gouri's outfit as Wilayat al-Jazair, or Algerian Province.

Just why this group would be elevated to provincial status remains somewhat perplexing, more so than any of the other African IS provinces investigated in this book. Indeed, why would IS Central seek to give such a status to a small, relatively unknown group? In short, we suggest that the process of affiliate utility validation in the case of Algeria may well have rested on the singular perceived benefits to IS Central of the Gourdel incident. Though new evidence may eventually come to light to suggest otherwise, it is not unreasonable to imagine that the group's pledge, followed by the subsequent murder of Gourdel, was an important moment in encouraging IS Central to grant the Jund al-Khilafa militants *wilaya* status. To recall: the caliphate had been declared just months earlier. To have a new group, based in the militant-rife landscape of Algeria, undertake an attack so clearly and brutally in line with IS Central's own tactics and publicity campaign, in defense of IS Central itself, and at great risk to the militants, may well have been a primary motivating factor for the elevation to provincial status. Yet, if this hypothesis is true, the downside of this logic would soon become manifest, with the irony being thick. If Gourdel's murder was indeed the key to gaining official recognition for Wilayat al-Jazair, that same attack would simultaneously put Gouri's and al-Asmi's small, ragtag band increasingly in the crosshairs of the Algerian government.

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PART THREE
THE POST-BAYAH PERIOD

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A Hollow and Hunted Organization

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Northern Algeria
September–December 2014

Despite having been elevated to the status of an official province by what was then the most infamous terrorist organization in the world, Wilayat al-Jazair remained small, isolated, and hunted by Algerian security forces. At its inception and following Gourdel's murder, the group consisted of no more than a few dozen fighters operating across nearly a hundred kilometers of the mountainous Algerian countryside east of Algiers: hardly the resounding return to prominence that Gouri may have envisioned when he defected to IS from AQIM. Instead, the September 2014 murder of Gourdel and its November 2014 recognition by the Islamic State as an official province made a target of Wilayat al-Jazair before it had the opportunity to entrench itself or grow, and this would ultimately prove an insurmountable problem for the upstart group.

Beginning in the fall of 2014, the Algerian state launched a massive security sweep. According to Geoff Porter, Gourdel's beheading "crossed some sort of line, or breached some kind of risk threshold," and put Jund al-Khilafa in the security forces' crosshairs for the next several months.[62] As Dario Cristiani has noted, the timing of Gourdel's murder—which followed Bouteflika's fourth re-election in April 2014 and the collapse of oil prices—was another factor in the government's response. The highly publicized murder of Gourdel "pushed the Algerians to be even more proactive and heavy-handed than usual."[63]

The Algerian reaction to the new IS province differed starkly from its approach to AQIM, whose cells still maintained a persistent if low-level insurgency of their own throughout the period, and even escalated attacks to prove their mettle and perseverance in Algeria following al-Asimi's killing.[64] Compared with AQIM, the new Wilayat al-Jazair proved "too much of an unknowable risk."[65] While Algeria's approach had been to tolerate a certain low level of political violence from AQIM, the calculus appeared to be that such an approach was not acceptable when the group conducted violence as graphic and geopolitically consequential as Gourdel's beheading.[66] In addition to significant international pressure to crush the group following Gourdel's murder, it was possible, as Geoff

Porter argues, that Algeria "didn't have the resources or timeframe to infiltrate the group" as they had so often done with AQIM, and instead chose to react aggressively.[67] It is also possible that the grisly, public execution of a foreign national was simply too much of a reminder of the GIA's tactics during the darkest years of the 1990s, leading security forces to react aggressively before such operations were repeated in northern Algeria.

These Algerian counterterror efforts would be visible on December 23, 2014, when Gouri himself was killed by Algerian security forces in Issers, seventeen kilometers from his hometown of Boumerdès and some sixty kilometers northwest of the site of Gourdel's kidnapping.[68] Gouri's killing —along with that of two others and the seizure of large amounts of weapons and explosives—followed a similar operation in Sidi Daoud two days before, and was much publicized in international media as a major victory over IS in Algeria.

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A Failed Leadership Reboot

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Boumerdès, Northern Algeria
December 2014–May 2015

Gouri's killing alone was not to be the end of Wilayat al-Jazair. Following his death, the group turned to its most prominent remaining member, al-Asimi. Previously Gouri's deputy, and the man who purportedly murdered Gourdel,[69] al-Asimi was, at the time, the obvious choice to assume the mantle of leadership. Throughout his time in leadership in the GSPC, he had witnessed the group's evolution into AQIM and the insurgency's faltering state under Droukdel, and had been the first to pledge allegiance to al-Baghdadi before forming Jund al-Khilafa with Gouri.

Only five months after assuming leadership of the Islamic State's Algerian province, al-Asimi, too, met his fate, less than a year after his July 2014 audiotaped pledge to al-Baghdadi. On May 19, 2015, Algerian security forces launched a fatal assault on a meeting in the Boukram forest

in southern Boumerdès, targeting the members of the Islamic State's Algerian province. Al-Asimi was killed,[70] alongside five of Wilayat al-Jazair's six military commanders.[71] Local media reported that Bouaicha Abdelghani, known as Amir, Djelaoui Ramdane, known as Abu Houmam, and Ledjalt Mohamed, known as Ahmed, were three of the five other commanders killed in the raid.[72] In addition to wiping out nearly all IS Algeria's top leadership cadre, the raid also killed twenty-one other militants from Wilayat al-Jazair.[73]

Of note is that, while Wilayat al-Jazair suffered, the IS Central seemingly offered little assistance to its fledgling Algerian affiliate. This general lack of observed interaction is in marked contrast to the substantial aid that IS Central offered its other North African provinces in Libya (chapter 2) and Sinai (chapter 4) around the same time, both before their predecessor groups pledged allegiance and once they became affiliates. Indeed, while IS Central was seemingly indifferent to the fate of its Algerian province, it simultaneously interacted significantly with and offered assistance to Boko Haram (its soon-to-be West Africa province) (chapter 6) further south.

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New Successors, New Failures

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Northern Algeria
May 2015–March 2017

While the May 2015 raid killing al-Asimi signaled a de facto end to the existence of Wilayat al-Jazair as an operational entity in its original form, the idea of Islamic State as an aspiration proved resilient. Indeed, though remnants of the original group remained, by the end of summer 2015 four more former AQIM cells pledged allegiance to IS Central and, collectively, they assumed the mantle of the Wilayat al-Jazair. The first of the pledges came via audio message on May 9, 2015, from Katibat Skikda, based in the eastern city of Skikda,[74] few details of whose capabilities or strength were

revealed.[75] In late July 2015, a second group, Saraya Ghuraba, operating in and around the eastern city of Constantine, pledged allegiance to IS Central.[76] Later, in September 2015, a video version of Saraya Ghuraba's pledge was released,[77] shortly followed by an audiotape proclaiming the pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State by a third group, Katibat al-Ansar.[78] A little over a week later, a video was released showing the pledge of allegiance of a fourth group, Humat al-Da'wah al-Salafiyah (Protectors of the Salafist Call), which had joined AQIM in December 2013.[79] The video showed more than a dozen men, armed with rifles and machine guns, as their leader Abu Abdul Wahab al-Mosteghanemi made his statement in front of a large IS flag.[80] Despite collectively serving as the new representatives of the battered Wilayat al-Jazair, in practice these small cells would have little discernible connection with one another or with the IS Central.

By 2016, of all the new groups then serving as the nominal representatives of Wilayat al-Jazair, Saraya Ghuraba would become the most infamous. Led by Noureddine Laouira (nom de guerre, Abu al-Hammam),[81] the group primarily operated in the forested mountains stretching from the northeast of Constantine to the south of Skikda.[82] Laouira's group carried out further attacks in the "triangle" between Jijel, Constantine, and Skikda, including a roadside bombing on October 7, 2016, purportedly targeting Algerian special forces between the town of Tamalous and the nearby village of Boumagane in Skikda.[83] Shortly thereafter, on October 11, another roadside bombing targeted a bus carrying workers near Guenguita, though it caused no injuries. Two days later, Algeria security forces killed two Wilayat al-Jazair personnel in northwestern Skikda, including the emir of the eastern region, Saddek Habbache, also known as Abu Dujana.[84] This was followed on October 28, 2016, by the assassination of the policeman Boukabour Amar in a restaurant in the northeastern Ziadia district of Constantine city, during which the three Saraya Ghuraba assassins stole their victim's gun, a picture of which was later broadcast on IS media channels.[85]

These October 2016 attacks were followed several months later by a highly publicized incident in Constantine city on February 28, 2017. Several militants representing Wilayat al-Jazair launched a coordinated

suicide bombing and gun attack on two police stations in the city, killing the bomber and injuring two policemen,[86] while the gunmen escaped.[87] Predictably, these attacks resulted in another round of heavy security sweeps by Algerian security forces. By the end of March 2017, Saraya Ghuraba had been all but dismantled[88] and its leader, Laouira, had been killed.[89] By the time these new cells carried out the spate of attacks around Constantine, security forces had gathered enough intelligence to identify and arrest more than forty individuals associated with the group.[90]

In contrast to their dealings with Gouri and al-Asimi's version of Wilayat al-Jazair in 2014 and 2015, Algerian security forces would take a more patient approach to the emergence of these new IS cells in 2016 and beyond. While these new representatives of Wilayat al-Jazair could occasionally manage to stage attacks, their members were subsequently often tracked down and their cells usually dismantled by security forces. The four isolated cells, plus the members of the original Wilayat al-Jazair, appear to have each recruited, at most, several dozens of fighters and sympathizers. They were often concentrated in small camps of a few individuals living in inhospitable conditions, wielding old weapons, and constantly fearing security sweeps. This hardscrabble and generally disconnected existence hardly matched the triumphalism of al-Baghdadi's declaration of the caliphate in June 2014, or Gouri and al-Asimi's vision of what their group could be. Nor did such conditions serve to attract many new members.

Instead, the Algerian state generally came to view Wilayat al-Jazair as a minor threat to stability. Dario Cristiani has noted that although Gourdel's September 2014 murder signaled a potential new threat that could grow into something much larger, once it became clear that it was limited, Algerian security forces viewed containment and a more deliberate process of cell dismantlement as a more appropriate strategy than outright destruction.[91] According to Geoff Porter, the authorities allowed known IS cells that thereafter came to represent Wilayat al-Jazair to exist so that their networks could be mapped out and addressed systematically, rather than merely targeting individuals who directly participated in attacks.[92]

Throughout Wilayat al-Jazair's decline, there was no evidence of any efforts by the IS Central to help reverse the fate of its Algerian affiliate. Perhaps as much as any IS affiliate in Africa, Wilayat al-Jazair was as

"sovereign" as an IS Central "subordinate" could be. To be sure, the mere fact that the Algerian province appeared in IS media releases was itself evidence of a link between the two, and in 2016 Amaq news agency released a photograph of Wilayat al-Jazair's assassination of a policeman.[93] Beyond these links in the media sphere, however, no additional evidence of financial, material, or personnel transfers has yet come to light. Indeed, while other African IS affiliates would find benefit in the flexibility that their occasional, though generally limited, relationships with IS Central afforded them, becoming an IS province in the case of Wilayat al-Jazair entailed all the dangers of being newly targeted by the Algerian state with little in the way of material or even reputational gains. For Wilayat al-Jazair, "sovereignty" in practice meant isolation, and isolation proved fatal.

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The Islamic State in Algeria at the Time of al-Baghdadi's Death

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Algeria
October 2019

By the time of al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019, Wilayat al-Jazair was, in reality, more an idea than a functioning militant entity. No attack by the province had been claimed in IS media outlets since 2017. When an attack was finally claimed in the name of Wilayat al-Jazair in November 2019, the month after al-Baghdadi's death, it took place in southern Algeria,[94] more a product of Islamic State's activities in the Sahara desert (see chapter 7) than of the remnant of fighters from groups led by Gouri, al-Asimi, and their successors in the north. Perhaps most telling of the group's decline was that the Islamic State's propaganda releases showing affiliates' pledges to al-Baghdadi's successor, al-Qurayshi, in November 2019 did not include a pledge from Wilayat al-Jazair at all.

As elsewhere on the African continent, the Islamic State "democratized jihad" in Algeria. To ambitious local leaders of an AQIM battalion who disagreed with their superiors on how their struggling insurgency should move forward, the Islamic State's global rise offered a new opening, an

alternative opportunity to potentially become national insurgent leaders in their own right. Gouri and al-Asimi gambled that affiliation with a new jihadi brand could resurrect their movement while continued reliance on AQIM could not.

Despite the meager resources and fighter numbers that the would-be group brought to the table, it is likely that the process of affiliate utility validation was aided by the Gourdel incident in September 2014. Offering the IS Central the appearance in public of having a global reach and following of brutal, extremist adherents, the incident would also subsequently underline to IS Central that one spectacular attack did not make a sustainable affiliate.

Following Wilaya Jazair's entrance into the world as an IS province, the IS Central showed no signs of improving the prospects for survival of Gouri, al-Asimi, and their successors. Where other African "sovereign subordinates" generally received some amounts of assistance even while remaining insulated from the IS Central's collapse in Iraq and Syria by their functional independence, Wilaya Jazair's near-complete independence doomed it to the same downward trajectory that would ultimately also befall AQIM in northern Algeria. While Gouri, al-Asimi, and their successors could mount small-scale operations for short periods of time, they quickly found that their mere branding as an IS province had made them more intensely targeted than their al-Qaeda compatriots had been. At the mercy of the heavy hand of Algerian counterterrorism operations, the group and its sundry offshoots could not endure.

4

THE ISLAMIC STATE IN SINAI

PART ONE
THE PRE-BAYAH PERIOD

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Revolution

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Egypt
2011–2014

The group from which the Islamic State's Sinai Province would ultimately be born, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM), emerged in around 2011.[1] It was, at its core, the product of the chaotic Egyptian political and security landscape following the Egyptian Revolution. As the winds of the Arab Spring swept the world after the self-immolation of Tunisian Mohammed Bouazizi in December 2010, Egypt too would find itself in the pathway of change. By late January 2011, millions of Egyptians had begun to take to the streets to protest against unemployment, poverty, and corruption under the rule of President Hosni Mubarak, who had presided over the country since 1981.

While protests emerged in the Egyptian capital of Cairo, primarily centered on Tahrir Square, similar pockets of anti-Mubarak protest would also erupt in other parts of the country. Anti-government demonstrators in Cairo and elsewhere survived relentless attacks from police until finally, on February 11, 2011, Mubarak agreed to step down as president of Egypt.[2]

With Mubarak's sudden departure, many political, military, social, religious, and security features that had defined Egypt for some thirty years were suddenly stripped away. The military, under the aegis of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), was now in control of Egypt and promised to hold elections.[3] Politically, the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist party calling for the institution of sharia law, which had been officially banned but which remained one of the most vibrant opposition forces in Egypt, was legalized in 2011.[4] Economically, both unemployment and inflation spiked, followed by a rise in imports and a stagnation in exports.[5]

The tumult that resulted from the Egyptian Revolution was particularly exploited in the country's Sinai Peninsula, whose inhabitants had long felt marginalized by Mubarak's government. The Sinai Peninsula—a 60,000-square-kilometer stretch of land bridging the continents of Africa and Asia, hemmed in by mainland Egypt to the west and Israel and the Gaza Strip to the east—has a population of around 600,000. The bulk of the land is divided into two Governorates: the lesser-populated and more tourist-centered South Sinai Governorate is known for beach resorts, including Sharm el-Sheikh, whereas the North Sinai Governorate, more densely populated, is inhabited mainly by Bedouins. Stemming from the Arabic term *badawi*—literally, "desert dweller"—the historically pastoralist Bedouin communities predominate in the desert landscape of North Sinai. With their distinct cultural and linguistic traditions,[6] they had long claimed social, political, and economic marginalization within broader Egyptian society. With few perceived economic opportunities, some Bedouins had turned to the trafficking of drugs, weapons, and humans.[7]

Essential in understanding the emergence of ABM and, later, the IS–Sinai are the links between the North Sinai population and those in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip, the neighbouring Palestinian territory. Since at least the 1990s, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip had been allies of those in the jihadist orbit in the Sinai. (Indeed, Sinai specifically and Egypt more

broadly have long histories of involvement in the global, transnational jihadist movement.)[8] By the end of the Second Intifada (2000–5), Hamas members in the Gaza Strip were cooperating extensively with militants in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. With Gaza effectively blockaded,[9] their allies in North Sinai would facilitate the movement of people and goods into the territory through underground tunnels. In exchange, not only did the Sinai tribes receive payment (which was important since, given their poor relations with the Egyptian government, they were barred from employment within the security apparatus and wider public sector), but Hamas also agreed to train the Bedouin tribes to fight the Egyptian government. At the same time, with the movement of some Palestinians into Egypt, the Sinai Peninsula became, as Mokhtar Awad has written, "an unparalleled environment in which to wage every jihadist's dream of attacking Israel."[10] As a result, North Sinai occasionally suffered draconian crackdowns by the Egyptian government in response to cross-border militant violence carried out by both Egyptians and Palestinians, thus creating often greater hostility against the governments of both Egypt and Israel. These realities, combined with the transborder location of families and the historical memory of the North Sinai as the battlefield in several Egyptian–Israeli wars during the 20th century, conspired to make North Sinai an incubator of jihadist sympathizers.

Following the ouster of Mubarak in February 2011 in the Egyptian mainland, the Sinai would play a pivotal role in the period after the uprising. During the chaos there was a series of jailbreaks in Cairo, during which an estimated 20,000 Islamists were released.[11] Hundreds of the liberated detainees were persons convicted on terrorism-related charges, among them members of the Muslim Brotherhood whose *raison d'être* was to dismantle Egyptian's secular governance system and replace it with Islamist rule.[12] In a bid to evade recapture while also seeking to re-establish a base where they could continue their fundamentalist proselytization, some Islamist detainees fled to the North Sinai Governorate.

* * *

The Rise and Evolution of Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM)

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Egypt
2011–2014

The newly escaped or released Islamists and Muslim Brotherhood prisoners, together with local disaffected Bedouins and Palestinians, and members of pre-existing Salafist-jihadist groups[13] began to congregate in Sinai, ultimately coalescing into a single group, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM). Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, or Supporters of the Holy House [Jerusalem],[14] focused on the intertwined goals of the erasure of Israel and the liberation of the Palestinians through armed rebellion. The establishment of ABM in 2011 did not necessarily signal the emergence of an entirely new militant group, but was rather the amalgamation of various actors and pre-existing jihadist groups in one umbrella formation.[15] ABM carried out several attacks, including a cross-border raid on Israeli troops in September 2012[16] and an assassination attempt on the interior minister of Egypt in September 2013.[17]

In June 2012, nearly sixteen months after the downfall of Mubarak, Egypt held its first-ever democratic elections.[18] The Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi won Egypt's presidency, while Islamist parties gained control of roughly two-thirds of assembly seats in the Egyptian parliament.[19] Yet, months after Morsi's election, unrest festered. The SCAF, the military council, was unhappy with the progress that the new government under Morsi was making. Likewise, secular protestors who had helped to overthrow Mubarak were unhappy with the Islamist Morsi's election. As time progressed, anger continued to mount against Morsi: in a move reminiscent of the very forces that had propelled him into office, in June 2013 protesters emerged on the streets of Egypt to call for his ouster, just one year after his election.[20] Though Morsi initially refused to step aside, he was ultimately deposed in a military coup on July 3, 2013[21] by his newly appointed minister of defense, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.[22]

Al-Sisi, who came into office as an alternative to the Islamist Morsi, began targeting Islamists, including those in Sinai.[23] With al-Sisi's turn towards anti-Islamist tactics, ABM shifted its hostility[24] away from Israel

and squarely towards the government of Egypt.[25] Beginning in late 2013 and early 2014, ABM launched several attacks. It attempted to assassinate the Egyptian interior minister in September 2013; it launched a suicide bombing in the South Sinai Security Directorate in al-Tor in October 2013, killing three; and it downed a military helicopter in January 2014.[26] Though 2011–13 have been called the "years of rebirth for jihadism in Sinai," one commentator has noted that "ABM's true rise to prominence came after the 2013 military coup, when it commenced a vengeful jihad against the [Egyptian] state."[27]

Among the cast of members that composed the increasingly anti-Egyptian umbrella group of ABM by late 2013 and early 2014, there was no shortage of al-Qaeda supporters and adherents. To be sure, Egypt has long felt the presence of militant Islamist groups. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, these groups waged a low-level insurgency against Hosni Mubarak. Over time, they would emerge, splinter, and reconstitute, particularly those with sympathy for al-Qaeda.[28]

Indeed, al-Qaeda's links to Egypt generally and ABM specifically had long been clear. Al-Qaeda's current leader (as of 2021), Ayman al-Zawahiri, himself an Egyptian, had long focused his gaze on the socio-political conditions in Egypt to consider their conduciveness to supporting the kind of extremism that he oversaw.[29] For its part, ABM's own propaganda often lionized al-Qaeda,[30] and ABM's communiqués were often disseminated by Al-Qaeda's Al-Fajr Media Center, an outlet which is generally used as a platform by affiliates of the transnationalist al-Qaeda network.[31] In January 2014 al-Zawahiri, the global leader of al-Qaeda, himself referred to ABM as "our men in the Sinai."[32]

Yet, while the mutual affinity between al-Qaeda and ABM was clear, ABM never publicly pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda. Without a known pledge[33]—and despite sympathy for al-Qaeda—ABM was never formally an affiliate branch of al-Qaeda as were al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (see chapters 3, 5, 6, and 7) or al-Shabaab (see chapter 8). By April 2014, the growth of ABM had led it to be designated as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) by the US State Department. In its designation, the State Department noted that ABM "shares some aspects of Al-Qaeda

ideology, but is not a formal Al-Qaeda affiliate, and generally maintains a local focus."[34]

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PART TWO
THE BAYAH PERIOD

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Filling the Void:
The Degradation of ABM and Responses from the Islamic State Central

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The Sinai Peninsula, Egypt
2014

Just why did ABM—many of whose members were al-Qaeda sympathizers, though it never became an affiliate itself—begin to consider an affiliation with the Islamic State? One of the most persuasive reasons was a practical one: ABM needed help. After three years in existence, ABM's rising levels of violence had brought it under increased pressure by the Egyptian government of al-Sisi, who, himself having come to power in a coup, sought to demonstrate to Egyptian civil society that the payoff for his military rule was improved security.[35] Thus, the al-Sisi administration launched a crackdown against ABM, razing houses and evacuating neighborhoods, among other tactics.[36] These efforts were, from the Egyptian state's perspective, considered a success: between March and October 2014, Egyptian forces targeted and killed successive ABM leaders and their replacements, totaling an estimated two dozen senior and mid-level ABM commanders in all.[37] In the first week of October 2014 alone, an estimated twenty ABM members were killed by Egyptian security forces.[38]

Besides the loss of operational leadership, many of these fallen ABM leaders had been some of the group's closest links with al-Qaeda. For instance, Tawfiq Mohammad Faraj, who had been a founder of ABM in 2011, had had direct ties with Thirwat Saleh Shihata, who himself served as

deputy of al-Qaeda when it came under the command of al-Zawahiri in June 2011. ABM's Faraj revealed to law enforcement that Shihata—and thus, by proxy, al-Qaeda—had provided him (and thus ABM) with finance and weapons, and that al-Qaeda Core was aware of future ABM operations.[39] With the killing of its top leaders, ABM's links with al-Qaeda, many of which were never formalized anyway, broke even further.[40]

Recognizing the new challenges that ABM was beginning to face in late 2014—and eager to establish its own foothold by means of a competent militant group in the Sinai—the IS Central stepped in. In a bid to make good on its stated ambitions to unify the Muslim *umma* under its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Islamic State saw the ABM as a potential ally. In its weakened state—ABM in early 2015 was estimated to have no more than 200 full-time members[41]—the IS Central saw a window of opportunity to court Sinai's most powerful and active Islamist organization, and gain an even stronger foothold in a country which hosted Africa's second-largest Muslim population, and which served as a historical epicenter of the transnational jihadi movement. Nor, as Samuel Tadros has noted, was the potential insult to its rival, Al-Qaeda, lost in the move: "Nothing diminishes Zawahiri [and al-Qaeda more] than the Islamic State stealing the main jihadi group in his own native country from him."[42]

As with other IS African affiliates like Libya (chapter 2) and Somalia (chapter 8), the IS Central initiated transnational contact in an attempt to court its future Egyptian affiliate.[43] In September 2014 the Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Shahid* reported (perhaps apocryphally) that Islamic State had dispatched a group of envoys headed by a senior IS Central member, Musa'id Abu Qatmah, to the Sinai Peninsula, traveling via Gaza.[44] (This followed previous alleged attempts by al-Baghdadi, up to one year earlier in August 2013, to gain the trust of other Sinai-based Islamist groups, including through financial inducements.)[45] In 2014, Qatmah's mandate was to convince the remaining ABM membership to pledge their allegiance to al-Baghdadi.[46] In October 2014, two ABM members who found the Islamic State's ideology—and, especially, its offer of resources—appealing travelled to Syria to meet al-Baghdadi's representatives with the intention of discussing the terms of an agreement between the two groups.[47] One of

them was Abu Osama al-Masry, who would become the spokesman for IS–Sinai, before eventually becoming its leader in August 2016.[48]

Other evidence provided by testimonies of captured jihadists—though it is disputed by some—suggests that IS Central even offered ABM members arms and funds if the group would agree to pledge allegiance to it.[49] In one instance, even before ABM's ultimate pledge, a suspect responsible for an attack on October 24, 2014 on the Karm al-Qawadis army checkpoint told authorities that IS Central had directed members of ABM to undertake the attack, and that the group had received weapons and funding to do so from IS affiliates in the Palestinian territories.[50] In another instance, in September 2014, a senior ABM commander anonymously told a Reuters reporter about the nature of ABM's relationship with IS Central: "They teach us how to carry out operations. We communicate through the internet." He continued: "They don't give us weapons or fighters. But they teach us how to create secret cells consisting of five people. Only one person has contact with other cells."[51]

In addition to the support offered directly by IS Central, members of other would-be African IS-affiliated groups, especially in Libya, were also eager to see ABM transition to a new IS *wilaya*. For instance, in September 2014, when Egyptian forces arrested eleven militants in the desert in Western Egypt, they were caught with three letters from Abu Ahmad al-Libi, an IS member in Libya. In the letters, al-Libi urged militant jihadist groups in the Sinai to unite under the black flag of the Islamic State. In exchange, the Islamic State would send all the funding and armaments they needed.[52] Thus, as ABM began to consider a pledge of *bayah* to IS Central, in Sinai the "democratization of jihad" came about through the loss of ABM's staunchest al-Qaeda connections and the rise of a more appealing and, as it turned out, more eager global jihadi parent group.

* * *

Becoming Wilayat Sinai

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The Sinai Peninsula, Egypt
November 2014

In November 2014, the courtship between ABM and the Islamic State ended when on the 10th ABM formally announced its pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Through an audio recording, which was uploaded to a Twitter social media account commonly associated with the group—and was also shared on other popular jihadi forums—an unidentified spokesperson declared: "In accordance with the teachings of the Prophet, we [Ansar Beit al-Maqdis] announce our allegiance to the Caliphate, and call on Muslims everywhere to do the same."[53] In addition to the simple pledge to al-Baghdadi, the group also inveighed against the Egyptian military regime of al-Sisi: "To our people in Egypt, what are you waiting for after the violation of your dignity? … After shedding the blood of your sons on the hands of this reckless tyrant [al-Sisi] and his soldiers? When will you take out your swords to face your enemies?"[54]

However, ABM's oath of fidelity to the Islamic State was not unanimous and did not necessarily reflect the interests of all members of the group. Indicative of these internal debates among ABM members, at least two other pledges of allegiance were made before November 2014, ostensibly in ABM's name, which were then rescinded or denounced as not reflecting the official position of the groups.[55] Indeed, these prior pledges brought to light schisms among the diverse array of actors in the ABM coalition, with some welcoming the pledge to the Islamic State while others sought to stay unofficially in the broader orbit of al-Qaeda.[56] The Sinai-based ABM's pledge to the Islamic State would be particularly contentious among other mainland, Nile Valley-based Egyptian jihadis with whom it had cooperated, as many of them still felt a great affinity for al-Qaeda.[57]

At the time of the pledge, some observers believed that the *bayah* to IS Central would ultimately likely prove detrimental to ABM's external relations.[58] In their view, the pledge to IS Central could signal a shift in ABM's violent activities, away from its traditional focus on military targets and, in the vein of IS Central, towards on a new focus on civilian targets. If the link with IS Central led to civilian targeting, this would make ABM too extreme for most Egyptians, whose disdain for civilian targeting was

evidenced most acutely in the general rejection of the slaughtering of some sixty-two mostly foreign tourists at Luxor by the Islamist group Gama'a al-Islamiyya in 1997;[59] but it would also likely inhibit ABM's continued ability to collaborate with other jihadists whose allegiances lay with al-Qaeda. Beyond alienating Egyptian civil society and al-Qaeda supporters, ABM's pledge would also put a target on the group's back, making it more likely that other regional states—then more preoccupied with the ascendant Islamic State than with the quieter al-Qaeda—would increasingly support Egypt's campaign against the group.[60]

For IS Central, however, the *bayah* from ABM was a welcome move. Not only was ABM a significant force located in the most populous Arab country in the strategic region—close to the Palestinian territories and the Suez Canal, and within striking distance of Israel—but the pledge from a reputable group allowed the Islamic State to continue its global public relations campaign, attracting other would-be affiliates to join its brand.[61] As Daveed Gartenstein-Ross has put it, "Rather than ABM's oath being a sudden occurrence, IS had worked to procure it for some time."[62]

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi accepted ABM's *bayah* on November 13, 2014, in the audio recording "Even if the Disbelievers Despise Such," accepting five other pledges at the same time, including those from Libya (chapter 2) and Algeria (chapter 3), as well as Yemen and Saudi Arabia.[63] Collectively, as Nelly Lahoud has noted, this simultaneous recognition is evidence of the degree of coordination between satellite groups and IS Central.[64] That IS Central would so quickly accept ABM's oath, offering it affiliate utility validation after only three days—the quickest such validation on the continent—was thus unsurprising. With that acceptance, the Wilayat Sinai was born, marking the third African country—along with Libya and Algeria—in which the Islamic State could claim a province.

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PART THREE
THE POST-BAYAH PERIOD

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The First Eight Months of the Islamic State in Sinai

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Various Locations
November 2014–June 2015

Just one month after becoming an official Islamic state province, IS–Sinai claimed the life of one of its first victims in December 2014: an American oil worker named William Henderson.[65] On 6 August 2014, the 58-year-old Henderson was seized while traveling near the Karama oil field, southwest of Cairo. At the time, details regarding Henderson's abduction were unclear, with both the Egyptian government and the US Embassy in Egypt remaining silent on the circumstances that led to the disappearance of the employee of the Houston-headquartered Apache oil exploration company. However, weeks after it had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, Wilayat Sinai claimed responsibility for Henderson's abduction. In a statement that IS–Sinai released through the same social media account on which its pledge of fidelity was published, it said, "We claim responsibility for the killing of American oil expert William Henderson in the Western Desert."[66] In providing proof of the deed, Wilayat Sinai presented images of Henderson's passport and an identification card confirming his association with Apache and the Qarun Petroleum subsidiary.

At least in its first half-year of existence, IS–Sinai could be seen to have benefited from its connections with IS Central and the three *wilayat* in Libya. Indeed, in its early years, some observers have argued that there existed a "very strong relationship between IS Sinai and IS core."[67] In terms of violence, IS Central and the Libya provinces seemed to inform, both directly and indirectly, IS–Sinai's actions. Between 2014 and 2015, Wilayat Sinai received finance, weapons, and ammunition from the Libya provinces. These transfers were facilitated by Salmi Salama Salim Sulayman 'Ammar, an ABM representative who in early 2014 had traveled to Libya, where he remained after ABM's transition to IS–Sinai.[68] By 2016, Egyptian intelligence services were expressing concern over a "network of fishing and small boats" connecting coastal North Sinai to Sirte, Libya; officials believed that these boats, undetectable on radar, were being used to move personnel, weapons, and money between IS–Sinai and Islamic State

in Libya from the IS capital in Sirte (chapter 2).[69] Moreover, IS Central's influence seemed to change the way IS–Sinai undertook violence. Tactically, IS–Sinai increased its targeting of civilians.[70] IS Central connections may also have been responsible for sending some non-Egyptians on violent missions: suicide attacks at the Karnak Temple in Luxor in June 2015, carried out by one Tunisian and several Sudanese nationals, are believed to have been orchestrated by IS Central given the presumed lack of zeal on the part of locals to undertake suicide operations against tourists and civilians.

In its media, IS–Sinai also changed the way it framed its goals. Although in its iteration as ABM, the group had released its own videos,[71] once it became IS–Sinai it announced the formation of its own media branch, Saleel al-Sawarim, in addition to changing its name on its Twitter account to "Wilayat Sinai."[72] As Kira Jumet and Zana Gulmohamad have demonstrated, its transition to an IS province altered the way the group publicly presented itself, moving away from "domestic issues" like Israel and Palestine and, in order to publicize their new status as an IS affiliate, focusing more on global concerns with questions of morality, especially on those who strayed from the "righteous path."[73]

While the exact influence of IS Central is not certain, by January 2015 IS–Sinai began to show some attempts at trying to govern, a goal to which its prior propaganda had alluded.[74] Despite having had no practical experience of control over population centers and little money to spend on governance,[75] IS–Sinai appeared to attempt to mimic the IS Central's wide-ranging governance activities in Iraq and Syria, in 2015. In one early instance, IS–Sinai distributed funds to residents of Rafah, whose homes had been destroyed under the Egyptian government's plan to create (somewhat ironically) a buffer zone on the border of the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza[76] for counterterror purposes.[77] Evidence also exists of its attempts to clamp down on the informal smuggling networks involving cigarettes and marijuana in July 2015.[78] To effectuate this modest governance agenda, IS–Sinai tried to buy off local senior tribal leaders, on one hand, and form operational partnerships with younger tribal members, on the other.[79] Despite these attempts, IS–Sinai's governance tendencies appeared to remain limited. Yet,

what little it could do in the way of practical governance, it would soon make up for in pure ambition.

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A Failed Takeover: The Islamic State's Siege of Sheikh Zuweid

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Sheikh Zuweid, Egypt
July 2015

It was shortly before seven on the morning of July 1, 2015, when gunshots broke the silence in the town of Sheikh Zuweid, Egypt. Nestled on the Sinai Peninsula, only ten miles from the closest village in Israel and even closer to the Gaza Strip, the Bedouin town of Sheikh Zuweid, while medium-sized, is one of the largest in the peninsula.

The cacophony of gunshots heard that July 2015 morning in Sheikh Zuweid emanated from the town's police station. Along the station's perimeter, heavily armed IS–Sinai members began spraying the walls with bullets. As one group of IS–Sinai fighters peppered the exterior walls, another group attempted to breach the police station itself. A third contingent of IS members set to work planting explosives around the facility, effectively trapping the occupants inside.[80]

Eduard Cousin, then a 29-year-old Dutch journalist, who was serving as managing editor of the Cairo-based English-language newspaper the *Daily News Egypt*, remembered that July 2015 day well. When the news came into Cousin's newsroom of an IS attack on Sheikh Zuweid, staff first thought that it was what they referred to as a "normal" IS attack against security forces. This type had become a weekly occurrence in North Sinai by that point in 2015. But when reports broke that IS militants had begun to attack multiple checkpoints around the city and not just the police station, Cousin and his staff began to wonder: "How big is this?"[81]

As it turns out, it was big. "This was not a typical hit and run action," Cousin recounted years later. "This was a full-frontal Islamic State attack

on Sheikh Zuweid in order to take over the town. Islamic State fighters had entered the town and had blocked its access roads."

As the police station was being besieged, some 300 to 400 IS militants began to target at least five military checkpoints around Sheikh Zuweid,[82] using a combination of car bombs and suicide attackers. Simultaneously, they began planting IEDs on roads leading to and from the town in anticipation of the arrival of police reinforcements. As the *Daily News Egypt*'s staff began to understand the magnitude of the attack, one of its reporters stumbled upon a surprising source in the center of the action.

As Cousin recounted, a journalist in her early twenties called Habibah,[83] who usually covered attacks in Sinai and had sources on the ground, was composing the first quick write-up of the IS siege for the newspaper's website, when she came across reports that the city was at risk of being taken over completely by the Islamic State. In an attempt to get confirmation, she decided to call the police station, whose landline number she found online.

To her own surprise, a voice at the other end of the line answered. "We are under siege," said Colonel Mohamed Soliman, who was himself caught in Sheikh Zuweid's booby-trapped police station. Yet he assured Habibah, "the city hasn't completely fallen. Otherwise, I would not be on the phone with you now."

"We couldn't believe we found a source this close to the fighting, sadly, in fact, fearing for his life at that very moment," remembered Cousin.

As the IS militants spread through the town, citizens in Sheikh Zuweid found themselves caught in the crossfire. When the power to the city was cut,[84] many residents were forced to stay in their houses.[85] Some would later report that they had seen others executed by the Islamic State for disallowing entry into their homes.[86]

Soon, Habibah called the trapped Colonel Soliman again. Even with the police station surrounded by IS militants, Soliman answered her questions. "Once, twice, three more times during that day, we called back, getting updates. We followed the events from the police station being surrounded and shot at by the Islamic State. As we checked in, Colonel Soliman waited in dread for his request for support from the Egyptian military to be fulfilled."

By late afternoon, members of the IS–Sinai had succeeded in taking over significant swathes of Sheikh Zuweid. Dozens of IS vehicles and motorbikes rolled through the city, and citizens reported IS members parading around the town on foot, reacting violently when anyone tried to stop them. Reports would emerge that IS members stood on roofs of buildings, firing rounds into the air, and also at security forces and security installations on the ground. Land Cruisers were seen driving through the town, with the Black Standard flying behind, and masked gunmen of the IS–Sinai at the wheel. After a morning of violence that engulfed many parts of the city, corpses littered the streets, and ambulances were unable to reach the wounded owing to the heavy gunfire.[87] Instead, donkeys were used to transport the injured.[88]

By late afternoon, the Egyptian Air Force responded, their F-16 fighter jets targeting militant positions in and around Sheikh Zuweid. By five o'clock, less than twelve hours after the Islamic State's appearance, Egyptian ground forces were finally able to enter the town.

By seven o'clock, IS–Sinai vaunted its success with a statement released on Twitter: "In a blessed invasion for which Allah facilitated its causes, lions of the Caliphate in Sinai Province were able to mount concurrent attacks on more than fifteen military and security locations of the apostate Egyptian Army."[89] In the statement, the Islamic State claimed that it had launched fifteen separate attacks, including two car bombs, in Sheikh Zuwaid as well as in the nearby town of al-Arish that day. It said it had employed aerial defense systems against the Egyptian army, as well as other weapons.[90]

Within twenty-four hours of the attack, the Egyptian government issued its own statement about the incursion and claimed that all IS forces had been expelled from Sheikh Zuweid. As a spokesman for the Egyptian military, Brigadier General Mohammed Samir, told state-run television sources the next day, July 2, 2015, the situation in Sheikh Zuweid and in North Sinai as a whole was, according to him, "100% under control."[91]

In total, some 21 locations—mostly police and military checkpoints[92]—were attacked around Sheikh Zuweid by an estimated 300 to 400 IS fighters.[93] The number of casualties varies depending on the source. The Egyptian government claimed that the Islamic State lost over 100 fighters

that day; for its part, the group cited only 17 fatalities.[94] IS militants also claimed that they had killed as many as one hundred soldiers.[95]

"By the time the Egyptian military entered and retook the city, we were relieved for Colonel Soliman," recounted Eduard Cousin. "But as time passed, what had just occurred began to sink in: the Islamic State's branch was now capable of full-scale attacks on towns in North Sinai. Colonel Soliman could have died; his talks with Habibah could have been his last. How bad is the situation there, why is the army not getting it under control? When and how is this ever going to end?"

Despite its failure, IS–Sinai's attack on Sheikh Zuweid constituted the most complex and largest IS ground attack outside Iraq and Syria until that date.[96] Some observers even suggested plausibly that IS Central may well have exerted pressure on its Sinai affiliate to at least attempt to hold the territory.[97]

* * *

Tomsislav Salopek

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Cairo, Egypt
July 2015

Following the unsuccessful raid on Sheikh Zuweid in July 2015, IS–Sinai soon showed more interest in attacking foreigners. On July 24, 2015, on the outskirts of Cairo's 6th October suburb, approximately twenty kilometers outside Cairo, armed gunmen stopped the car in which Tomislav Salopek was traveling. Salopek, a Croatian topographer employed by the French firm Compagnie Générale de Géophysique, was on his way to a location just outside the city to carry out some seismic work for a land acquisition project. He was captured and bundled into an unmarked car.[98] His driver, an Egyptian national, was left unharmed and would later inform security services that Salopek's kidnappers had strong Bedouin accents. The criminal gang that kidnapped Salopek eventually turned him over to members of Wilayat Sinai.[99]

On 5 August 2015, two weeks after Salopek's abduction, Wilayat Sinai released a video in which it claimed to be holding the Croat national. IS–Sinai demanded that the Egyptian government provide a concession for his release: freeing all female Muslim prisoners held in Egyptian jails. Wilayat Sinai stated that if the Egyptian government did not comply with its demands within forty-eight hours, it would execute Salopek. To add to the macabre nature of the demand, it published a countdown clock, which ticked down to the execution of Salopek, set at 5.35 p.m. Central European time on August 7, 2015. IS–Sinai's threat was not empty. The deadline passed without Wilayat Sinai's demands being met. On August 12, one week later, IS–Sinai released a report supposedly showing Salopek's decapitated body lying in the Egyptian sand in an unmarked location.[100]

* * *

Crash

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Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt
October and November 2015

The bloody 2015 campaign of IS–Sinai would continue.

At 5:50 on October 31, 2015, Metrojet Flight 9268, an Airbus A-321, left the Sharm el-Sheikh International Airport in the southern Sinai Peninsula. Aboard the plane en route to the Pulkovo Airport in St. Petersburg were 122 Russian tourists, as well as four Ukrainians and one Belarussian, plus a crew that consisted of seven Russians. Many of the passengers had been vacationing at various resorts on the Southern Sinai's coastal resorts on the Red Sea, a favourite tourist destination for Russians. The flight was operated by a Russian company, Kogalymavia, based in Moscow, and operating under the English name Metrojet.

After its takeoff, the flight ascended normally. After some 22 minutes, it reached an altitude between 30,000 and 31,000 feet.[101] It was at minute 23, or 6:13 local time, when the catastrophe struck. Rapidly, the plane experienced a severe drop in altitude,[102] declining from a speed of 400 knots to just 62 knots.[103] Soon after, the plane made a vertical fall, splitting

in two at a high altitude,[104] and, engulfed in flames, plummeted from the sky.[105]

The remains of Metrojet Flight 9268 would be located later that day in a remote stretch of the Sinai Peninsula near the town of el-Hassana.[106] Investigators described it as a "tragic scene." The corpses of some passengers, charred, sat fastened into their seats.[107] Burnt bodies were also found littered in a radius extending miles from the crash site.[108] Most of the dead were women. There were also many children, including ten-month-old Darina Gromova, whose mother had taken a photo of her watching planes take off at St. Petersburg before their trip to Egypt.[109] All passengers and crew members perished. Nearly a year later, it was revealed that the majority of the passengers had succumbed to a severe change in cabin pressure—or "barotraumas"—after the plane's tail separated from its body.[110]

As news of the aviation incident was reported on international media outlets, just hours after the crash, IS Central claimed the attack.[111] The statement it released read:

> The soldiers of the caliphate succeeded in bringing down a Russian plane in Sinai. It was carrying more than 220 Russian crusaders. All of them were killed, and praise is for Allah. This is to show the Russians and whoever allies with them that they shall have no safety in Muslim lands or airspace, and that their daily killing of dozens in Sham via their airstrikes shall result in their demise. More than 220 crusaders were on board. All were killed, praise God.[112]

The Islamic State called this attack retribution for Russian support for Syrian president Bashar al-Assad.[113]

Over the ensuing days, alternative theories began to circulate that the downing was not caused by the Islamic State in Sinai, as IS Central had claimed, but rather by any number of other mechanical failures on the plane. Among other suggestions were metal fatigue that led to structural failure, a fuel explosion, or overheated batteries.[114] Both Egypt and Russia denied that the crash had been caused by terrorism,[115] rejecting the claim that IS–Sinai had been responsible for the plane's downing. Behind the

Egyptian denial was presumably a sense of national self-preservation: as Egypt in general and the Red Sea region specifically are reliant on tourism, the potential admission that the country faced a terror threat that put international tourists in its crosshairs could have a devastating impact on its economy.

"[The crash] was not a terror act. It was an accident," asserted Mamdouh Eldamaty, the minister of Egyptian antiquities, just days after the crash, as he attended an event to promote the Egyptian tourism sector in the fabled city of Luxor,[116] opening three tombs to the public in a bid to outflank negative media tropes about the country.[117] President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi referred to the IS–Sinai claim as mere propaganda, intended to embarrass his government.[118] Russia also denied the Islamic State claim of responsibility, stating that, despite the spectre of terrorism by the Islamic State in Sinai: "One cannot rule out a single theory, but at this point there are no reasons to voice just one theory as reliable—only investigators can do that."[119] Out of precaution, major airlines like Lufthansa and Air France prohibited their flights from crossing over Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.[120]

Yet even as these alternative theories and statements of denial accrued, the Islamic State's claim seemed to hold sway.[121] On November 4, 2015, IS–Sinai released another statement, taunting crash investigators. In it, the group claimed responsibility for the incident, but refused to reveal their tactics: "We are the ones who downed [the plane] by the grace of Allah, and we are not compelled to announce the method that brought it down."[122]

When it came to the Islamic State's responsibility, two main theories were posited: that it had shot the plane down with a missile, or that it had placed a bomb on board.[123] The first theory was soon disproved. Members of Wilayat Sinai would not have had access to surface-to-air missiles (SAM) which might have reached the plane, while man-portable air-defense system missiles (MANPADS), to which they may have had access, reach only to around 11,000 feet—far lower than the 30,000 feet at which the Metrojet was flying.[124] The missile theory was additionally disproved when American satellite images showed a heat burst coming from the plane just before it went down. This burst, lacking a trailing tail, suggested that it could not have been shot down by a missile.[125]

Evidence began to point to a bomb on board. On November 4, 2015, just four days after the crash, British investigators asserted that there was a "significant possibility" that a bomb had downed the Metrojet flight. Israeli intelligence officials told their Egyptian counterparts that they had intercepted communications in which Sinai-based militants bragged of using a baggage handler to smuggle an explosive device aboard the aircraft at Sharm el-Sheikh International Airport.[126] In support of this theory, investigators found traces of explosives in the wreckage. Days later, US intelligence agencies revealed that they had picked up "chatter" between IS affiliates in the Sinai Peninsula who bragged to IS Central leadership in Raqqa about their downing of the jet.[127]

Less than three weeks from the time of the crash, some degree of certainty was reached as to just how and why Metrojet 9268 had met its fate. On November 18, 2015, IS Central, in its propaganda magazine *Dabiq*, again claimed responsibility for the Metrojet attack. This time, it explained its motivations, and showed and told how the attack was undertaken. "After having discovered a way to compromise the security at the Sharm el-Sheikh International Airport [in the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt] and resolving to bring down a plane belonging to a nation in the American-led Western coalition against ISIS, the target was changed to a Russian plane."[128] As Russia had recently decided to undertake airstrikes in Syria, beginning in September 2015,[129] the Metrojet plane was an ideal target.[130] The *Dabiq* article continued: "A bomb was smuggled onto the airplane, leading to the deaths of 219 Russians and 5 other crusaders only a month after Russia's thoughtless decision [to join the international anti-IS coalition]."[131]

Perhaps even more striking than the claim, detailed rationale, and explanation itself was the means by which the blast was effectuated. The *Dabiq* article showed the bomb itself: an otherwise innocuous-looking can of the soft drink Schweppes Gold. The retrofitted can, which apparently contained a switch and detonator, held enough explosive material to crack the Airbus A321 apart at 30,000 feet. Subsequent reports revealed that the can had indeed been smuggled into the hull of the plane by an employee at the Sharm el-Sheikh Airport, whose cousin had allegedly traveled to join the Islamic State in Syria the year before.[132] The explosion made by this simple can would cause the deadliest aviation event in all 2015, as well as in Russian history. The occurrence of the attack was also auspiciously

timed: it occurred more or less on the one-year anniversary of the creation of IS–Sinai, after its predecessor group, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, pledged allegiance to IS Central.[133]

* * *

Exploiting Sectarianism

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Sinai Peninsula, Egypt
Late 2016–Late 2017

Throughout its history, IS–Sinai has most acutely targeted government and security forces, most commonly with the use of IEDs.[134] Though less frequently, civilians have also found themselves victims of its violence. According to data from Oded Berkowitz, civilians accounted for between 5 percent and 14 percent of IS–Sinai's attack targets, year over year, from 2015 to 2019.[135] Most notably, IS–Sinai's attacks on civilians sought to emulate its parent group in Iraq and Syria by attempting to stoke sectarian tensions—a relatively new strategy for global jihadists. Together, this dual focus on military and civilian targets constituted what Colin Clarke has called IS–Sinai's "hybrid strategy."[136]

In seeking to sow religious division, IS–Sinai first began to attack Sufis, whose version of Islam is often characterized as overly "mystical," and thus not sufficiently puritanical for Salafists, who sometimes deride them as "sorcerers."[137] One notable example of IS Sinai's violence against Sufis occurred in November 2016, when the group beheaded a 90-year-old Sufi cleric, Abu Heraz, and one of his disciples, Qutayfan Burak Eid Mansour.[138] According to IS–Sinai, the men were guilty of "possessing knowledge of the occult" and practicing "divination."[139] In IS Central's December 2016 *Al-Naba* publication, the head of IS–Sinai's *Hisbah* unit warned: "We tell all Sufi lodges, sheikhs, and followers inside the Sinai and outside that we will not allow the presence of Sufi orders in the Sinai or Egypt."[140]

In addition to attacking Sufis, IS–Sinai sought to stoke sectarian tensions by targeting Coptic Christians. Following a pattern first undertaken by ABM—which had quietly targeted Christians, using as car bombs vehicles bearing crosses that they had hijacked[141]—IS–Sinai laid its intentions bare: it sought to rid Egypt of its Christian population of around nine million.[142] In a video, IS–Sinai stated that Christians of Egypt were its "favorite prey."[143] Making good on its word, in February 2017 it targeted two Christian churches in al-Arish, the largest city and capital of the North Sinai Governorate. In total, seven people were killed.[144] Thereafter, the Islamic State warned Muslims to stay away from Christian spaces, indicating the likelihood that they would be targeted again.[145]

As it continued its sectarian attacks, IS–Sinai began to show that the Salafist version of jihad that it pursued in the targeting of other sects and religions was to be put in place though a renewed effort at governance. In a video released in March 2017, it announced that it had created a *Hisbah* (or morality) police—as the Islamic State had done in Iraq, Syria, and Libya—to ensure that the Islamic State's laws were followed.[146] In Sinai, the *Hisbah* police enforced a similar code of conduct to that in Sirte and Derna (chapter 2). Vices like smoking, drinking, and drug use were forbidden. Men were forbidden to trim their beards, while women were forbidden to show their faces. Christians were denounced as unbelievers and Sufi Muslims were referred to as heretics: tombs and shrines, which the *Hisbah* also deemed to be impious, were also destroyed.[147]

As in Libya, infraction of the rules elicited punishments ranging from the mundane to the severe. Citizens reported that IS–Sinai had confiscated satellite dishes, while a store that sold DVDs (presumably some that contravened IS–Sinai's norms of propriety) was shuttered.[148] Other reports reveal IS–Sinai's incineration of truckloads of cigarettes and possibly marijuana.[149] More brutal measures were also taken. One man reported seeing a man being whipped at least ten times for selling cigarettes;[150] another video showed a presumed thief having his hand cut off.[151] In a bid to keep the local populace from cooperating with Egyptian security forces, IS–Sinai made a point of beheading those Egyptians deemed to be collaborating with the government.[152]

As in Libya, women faced particular scrutiny. Several women reported that the buses they were riding on stopped and members of the Islamic State confronted them. In one interview, a Reuters reporter spoke to a female teacher who was on a bus from al-Arish to Rafah—firmly in the triangle of IS–Sinai's area of operations—that was stopped at an informal IS Sinai roadblock in February 2017. IS members boarded the bus, telling her and other women that they should be traveling with male chaperones, and that they should all have their faces veiled. Some days later, the Islamic State stopped her bus again, telling her that if she did not wear *niqab* she would be punished by whipping or having acid thrown on her.[153] On the whole, though, IS–Sinai operated according to what Jake Greene has called the "Machiavellian notion of the feared-yet-loved leader," mixing harsh punishments for dissidents with acts of benevolence for supporters, including offering living allowances and food rations to locals.[154]

* * *

Wilayat Sinai's most deadly sectarian attack was yet to come. At around 4 p.m. on November 24, 2017, in the village of al-Rawda, located east of the North Sinai governorate town of Bir al-Abed, several SUVs pulled up to the local mosque, situated along the Sinai Peninsula's main costal highway, which stretches from Port Said to the Palestinian city of Gaza. In the weeks prior to the attack, the Islamic State had purportedly been distributing flyers around the mosque to the residents of Bir al-Abed, telling worshipers to cease so-called heretical Sufi worship.[155] After planting IEDs around the mosque, IS militants then burst through the doors, with gunmen opening fire on hundreds of worshippers participating in the late afternoon *Asr* prayers. The attack killed 311.[156]

One of the victims that day was an Egyptian man named Baahir,[157] a government employee and NGO worker. Having left Sheikh Zuweid—the town that the Islamic State attempted to take over during its day-long siege in July 2015—for fear of violence, Baahir relocated to Bir al-Abed, where he found a home among family. When Baahir's brother, Mohammed,[158] heard of the Islamic State's attack at the Belal mosque in November 2017, he grabbed a gun and headed by car to the mosque.

“Bodies were all over the place. The walls of the mosque were covered in blood and bullet holes,” remembers Mohammed. “It was crowded as whole families came to see if their relatives were killed or not. The ambulances did not know whether to transport the serious injuries first or the less serious injuries. Everyone used their cars as ambulances,” he would recount years later.

“When I saw the body of Baahir, I could not believe it. We just had a phone call together the day before. He was a person who helped people. He worked on communicating with civil society organisations to help the impoverished families in Sinai. He had a list of at least eighty families to whom he delivered salaries, food, clothes every month,” Mohammed said.

“He was hit in the neck, but we nevertheless took him to the hospital.” This presented its own challenges. “The hospital was even scarier [than the scene of the attack]. Thousands were at the emergency service, and there was a line of blood that started from the entrance up to the operations room, and later the morgue,” he would recount.

In the hospital, Mohammed saw a woman who had lost five male relatives. “She looked so sad to the extent she was very quiet and was not able to scream. She looked like she wanted to collapse, but that is how Bedouin women are. They are strong and resilient.”

After the traumatic day, Baahir, along with many other innocent Egyptian bystanders, was buried in a mass grave. “The number of bodies was huge,” Mohammed recalled. “They had to dig the graves using a bulldozer.” “He will always be remembered as a man who, if he had had a piece of bread to feed his family, would have given it to the poor,” said Mohammed.

Breathtakingly, the attack on the al-Rawda mosque surpassed the death toll of even the Metrojet downing, making it the deadliest terror event in contemporary Egyptian history, and the second-deadliest terrorist incident in the entire world in 2017.[159] And, while there have yet to be any formal claims of responsibility for the al-Rawda mosque attack,[160] and the attack was not referenced on any platform or in any publication,[161] even by IS Central, most agree that Wilayat Sinai was the perpetrator.

* * *

Crackdown

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Sinai Peninsula, Egypt
2013–2019

Throughout the existence of both ABM (2011–14) and IS–Sinai (2014–), the Egyptian state has never been a passive observer of the groups' activities. As both waged campaigns of violence, perhaps one of the most notable features of Wilayat Sinai's existence has been the extreme, often brutal, efforts that the Egyptian state has undertaken to stop the group, many of which have fanned, rather than extinguished, the flames of discontent.

Arguably the beginning of harsh Egyptian counterterrorism efforts came on July 24, 2013, when al-Sisi—then still serving as minister of defense three weeks after Morsi's fall—requested extreme powers to fight terrorism. In a speech, al-Sisi gave a *tafweed*, or approval, for wide-ranging counterterror capabilities for the Egyptian state. It was, as the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy refers to it, the beginning of Egypt's own "War on Terror."[162] And as another observer asserts, this mandate to fight terror has come to define Egypt ever since.[163] Indeed, from July 2013 to July 2018, the Egyptian government reported some 1,800 counterterror operations. The media have reported on nearly 1,700 more.[164]

A more recent iteration of the Egyptian counterterror campaign was provoked, ironically, not by IS itself, but rather by militants sympathetic to al-Qaeda.[165] In what is known as the Wahat Road attack, al-Qaeda-aligned militants from Jund al-Islam (which had been largely dormant for some years)[166] and former members of ABM who had rejected allegiance to the Islamic State, ambushed an Egyptian Army convoy on October 21, 2017, in Egypt's Western Desert region at the Bahariya Oasis, some 180 kilometers west of Cairo, killing sixteen police officers.[167] In the aftermath of that attack, which was met with considerable public outcry, President al-Sisi issued a presidential decree appointing Lieutenant General Mohamed Farid Hegazi as the military's new chief of staff. The appointment was also intended to crack down on IS militants in the Sinai.

For Hegazi, IS–Sinai's al-Rawda mosque attack, which occurred in November 2017, the month following his appointment, undoubtedly served as his baptism by fire after he had assumed one of the most powerful offices within the Egyptian state. On December 6, 2017, al-Sisi made a televised address, mandating Hegazi to crush the Islamic State's Sinai insurgency within ninety days, giving him and the Egyptian armed forces authority to use "brute force" if necessary.[168]

Even though the early stages of the Egyptian counterterrorism campaign succeeded in killing dozens of Wilayat Sinai militants, dismantling their hideouts, and uncovering their weapons caches, the threat posed by the IS affiliate remained acute. In the face of these efforts by the state, IS–Sinai launched an audacious assassination attempt targeting Egypt's minister of defense, Sedky Sobhy, and minister of the interior, Magdy Abdel Ghaffar, who in December 2017 made an unannounced visit to the city of al-Arish (the capital of the North Sinai Governorate), ostensibly to see the progress of military operations against Wilayat Sinai. During their arrival at the al-Arish International Airport, militants opened fire by shelling the commercial hub, killing one military officer and wounding two others.[169] Ghaffar and Sobhy were unharmed in the attack, for which the Islamic State's Amaq agency claimed responsibility less than twenty-four hours later. In its statement, the militant group's media arm noted that it had fired a Kornet anti-tank guided missile targeting a helicopter accompanying the security delegation to al-Arish, killing and injuring officers on board.[170]

By February 2018—nearly the end of Lieutenant General Hegazi's ninety-day window to defeat IS–Sinai—it was clear that despite the losses it had suffered, the group remained resilient. A renewed plan was needed. On February 9, 2018, the al-Sisi administration announced that it had launched Comprehensive Operation, which would be commonly known as Operation Sinai. From the city of al-Arish, Army spokesman Colonel Tamer al-Rifai provided a brief description of Operation Sinai:

> The operation will include the implementation of … military and training missions and exercises in all strategic directions with the aim of tightening control of the borders of the Egyptian state and to ensure the achievement of the planned aims of the clearing of terrorist pits from the areas where they are found, and to protect Egyptian society from the evils of terrorism and extremism, while

> also confronting other crimes that affect internal security and stability … [The armed forces] call on all Egyptians in all parts of the republic to closely cooperate with the forces of law enforcement to confront terrorism and weed out its roots, and to promptly report any elements that threaten the security and stability of the homeland.[171]

From its onset, Operation Sinai involved an intensification of the military's occupation of the North Sinai Governorate, and soon the daily lives of Sinai's residents were marked by disruptions to their social activities, travel, and trade. A key feature of Operation Sinai in its initial stages was the suspension of all movement in and out of the capital, al-Arish. State-mandated internet and telecommunication blackouts became the norm rather than the exception, severing the already isolated peninsula from its few linkages with the wider Egyptian state. Oded Berkowitz has noted this period also saw the start of one of the first widespread uses of electronic warfare by the Egyptian state, which disrupted communications in Israeli and Palestinian towns in a bid to stop communications between IS–Sinai members, who were using non-Egyptian SIM cards to communicate.[172]

However, the quotidian inconveniences wrought by Operation Sinai would pale in comparison with the human toll of the security initiative. Indeed, even prior to the February 2018 launch of Operation Sinai, Egypt's North Sinai Governorate held the unenviable record of having the highest rate of human rights abuses recorded in Egypt. In 2016, for instance, the Sinai Peninsula saw an estimated 1,234 extra-judicial killings, accounting for 89.2 percent of all extrajudicial killings in Egypt over that same period. The vast majority of them occurred in the towns of Sheikh Zuweid and al-Arish, two of the centers of IS–Sinai's operations.[173] (In another metric emblematic of the exceptionally wide sweep of detentions in Sinai, between September 2015 and December 2016 the Egyptian state claimed to have killed 2,529 Wilayat Sinai militants and arrested 2,481 others.[174] These figures, however, should give pause: estimates from both the United States' Central Intelligence Agency[175] and other researchers' assessments of the total size of the Sinai's militant population[176] have for years been placed the group at no more than a thousand combatants.)

The already troubling pattern of extrajudicial killings and abuses would worsen with the initiation of Operation Sinai. More than one year later, in May 2019, Human Rights Watch released a review of the litany of crimes that had occurred in the Sinai Peninsula under the counterterrorism program's auspices. According to the organization, extrajudicial killings, custodial torture, and mistreatment marked the counterterrorism response of the Egyptian government in its latest operation aimed at ridding the Sinai of its radicalized population. Human Rights Watch noted that the worst abuses occurred at security checkpoints which had been established and manned by military personnel along the region's major highways. At these checkpoints, Sinai residents were often arbitrarily arrested and transferred to detention facilities—such as Battalion 101, located in al-Arish; Camp al-Zohor, a converted youth and sports center in Sheikh Zuweid; and al-Azoly, a military prison inside al-Galaa Military Base—where they would be subjected to various forms of abuse. In its report, Human Rights Watch underscored testimony from a detainee at Camp Zohor in al-Arish, who recounted the words of his military interrogator. "It's true that in army [detention] some people are taken wrongly, and others die," the interrogator said. "But we also fight *takfiris*, and arrest [many] of them."[177]

More acutely, Human Rights Watch has drawn attention to two specific aspects of Operation Sinai and its predecessors which have been particularly detrimental to civil–military relations in the North Sinai Governorate. First, it noted that the demolition of residential properties was one inflammatory component of Egypt's anti-IS counterterrorism strategy which had drawn the ire of Sinai's residents. In a few instances, property destruction was the result of airstrikes by the Egyptian Army in so-called buffer zones, or populated areas close to militant hideouts. However, the destruction of properties within "buffer zones" in North Sinai had also become a systematic process. Since February 2018, the Egyptian military was said to have destroyed more than 3,000 residential properties, 600 commercial buildings, and several hundred farms within buffer zones in the cities of al-Arish and Rafah.[178] The properties targeted were either linked to the terrorist activity or were targeted simply because of their location within zones deemed strategic for the Egyptian state, such as the town of Rafah, whose population were accused of facilitating smuggling operations between the Sinai and Gaza from which Wilayat Sinai benefited.

Human Rights Watch also drew attention to the Egyptian Army's employment of local tribesmen[179] in both combat and intelligence roles to augment the military's broad-based counterterrorism strategy. So extensive and overt was the uptake of civilians within the military's structures that they had assumed titles such as *manadeeb* (delegates), *gawasees* (spies), or "Battalion 103," the last a nod to the Battalion 101 detention facility in al-Arish.[180] Despite not being formally assimilated into policing or infantry positions, Battalion 103 members were provided with uniforms, weaponry, payments, and even powers to arrest.[181] In several instances, Human Rights Watch noted that *manadeeb* and *gawasees*—several of whom were recruited despite having criminal records—had used their military-given powers to settle personal scores.[182]

* * *

The Islamic State in Sinai at the Time of al-Baghdadi's Death

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Sinai Peninsula, Egypt
October 2019

At the moment of al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019, the Islamic State in Sinai had become less lethal than it once was, though it still remained resilient—and deadly—even in the face of often extreme counterterror measures by the Egyptian state. According to claims from IS Central, in 2019, IS–Sinai conducted some 160 attacks, mostly low fatality events caused by IEDs and roadside bombings.[183] And yet, despite IS Central's *annus horribilis*, IS–Sinai maintained a degree of allegiance to it. On June 19, 2019, members of IS–Sinai released a video as part of the Islamic State's "And the [Best] Outcome Is for the Righteous" video series in which it renewed it a pledge to al-Baghdadi even after the fall of Baghouz and the destruction of the "territorial caliphate."[184] On November 3, 2019, IS–Sinai pledged allegiance to the new caliph, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi.[185]

Across the three life cycle periods we have identified, IS–Sinai might be thought of as a relatively prototypical IS African affiliate. Amid its loss of leadership during the pre-*bayah* period, members of the Ansar Beit al-Maqdis coalition—never a formal branch of al-Qaeda—found the IS Central's courtship attractive, offering it new and diverse options for global jihadist affiliation. While pledging allegiance to IS presented ABM with some pitfalls—namely, alienating pro-al-Qaeda members, risking opposition from Egyptian civil society, and putting a target on its own back—its leaders saw affiliation as in their self-interest. A newly democratized set of affiliate options was considered a boon.

During the *bayah* period, the process of affiliate utility validation occurred exceptionally quickly: IS Central accepted ABM's pledge, elevating the group to *wilaya* status after only three days. That IS Central would so quickly recognize AMB's utility as the basis of its new Sinai province was unsurprising: with a sympathetic local population living in a strategically important location, IS Central courted ABM to become an affiliate, rather than the other way round. From evidence of IS Central envoys traveling to Sinai, ABM members traveling to meet IS Central representatives, and interactions between ABM and other IS provinces in Libya, tangible though limited connections between satellite and core were apparent from early on. For IS Central, the absorption of ABM as its Sinai province required little consideration—unlike other IS African provinces—and, given its occurrence at the same time that Libya and Algeria were elevated, it is indicative of communication between ABM and IS Central before the pledge.

Yet, despite the perceived benefits that its new Sinai province may have offered to IS Central, the relationship between principal and agent showed only occasional evidence of clear direction, especially as time wore on. While members of IS–Sinai seemingly gained various degrees of inspiration from the modus operandi of IS Central—fitful attempts at governance; failed attempt at a town-wide takeover in Sheikh Zuweid in July 2015; and a proclivity to stoke sectarian divisions—little evidence has emerged to show that IS Central directed IS–Sinai's activities at all after 2015. Instead, IS–Sinai was as much a sovereign subordinate as any other African province.

Collectively, the *wilayat* in Libya (chapter 2), Algeria (chapter 3), and Sinai (chapter 4) would constitute the Islamic State's first provinces on the

African continent, all in North Africa. Yet, a fourth North African group, in Tunisia, would struggle to gain the same degree of recognition.

5

THE ISLAMIC STATE IN TUNISIA

PART ONE
THE PRE-BAYAH PERIOD

*

The Arab Uprisings and the Re-emergence of Islamism in Tunisia

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Tunisia
2010–2011

On December 17, 2010, in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid, a 26-year-old street fruit vendor, Tarek el-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire. Earlier that day, a Tunisian policewoman named Faida Hamdy had confiscated the scales that Bouazizi used to weigh produce on his fruit cart —which he used to try to eke out a living for himself and his family— because he refused to pay her a bribe. On his refusal, the policewoman allegedly slapped him across the face, insulted his dead father, spat at him, and kicked over his fruit cart. Humiliated, Bouazizi went to local authorities to complain of his treatment and to request the return of his scales. His

protestations fell on deaf ears. The governor refused to see him, and Bouazizi was prevented from entering the building.[1]

The public embarrassment of the day, combined with long-standing frustrations, proved too much. Overwhelmed, Bouazizi went back to the local municipal building,[2] and, covering himself in gasoline, shouted, "How do you expect me to make a living?" before setting himself alight.[3] The burns he suffered, which covered ninety percent of his body, led to his death on January 4, 2011, eighteen days later.[4] The act of self-immolation was intended to send a message: Bouazizi could no longer tolerate the lack of opportunities afforded to someone like himself, a reality that he, like many others, attributed to the repressive and unresponsive Tunisian state.[5]

Within hours of his self-immolation, protests emerged in the town that would spread not only throughout Tunisia but eventually the entire region, growing into the political earthquake known as the Arab Uprisings. Inspired by Bouazizi's protest and aggrieved by their own political and socio-economic circumstances, popular uprisings broke out throughout the Arab world as local populations rose up against the ossified, corrupt, and repressive governments that had so long ruled in so many countries. Beginning in Tunisia, the protests would spread to Algeria, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Territories, Sudan, and Western Sahara. Protests were met with brutal crackdowns in both Bahrain and Syria; in the latter they would spiral into a catastrophic civil war. In Yemen, Libya (chapter 2), and Egypt (chapter 4), protestors toppled long-standing dictatorships despite often ruthless responses from security forces.

In Tunisia, protests in reaction to Bouazizi's self-immolation in the impoverished, far-flung town of Sidi Bouzid in the country's neglected interior flared up in nearby towns, as well as the capital, Tunis, and the wealthier coastal areas. Within weeks, between December 2010 and January 2011, Tunisia was gripped by protests; in response, the government deployed riot police.[6] After nearly four weeks of the largest protests in Tunisia's history, which resulted in the deaths of an estimated 338 people,[7] Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali—who had served as president from 1987 to 2011—finally fled to Saudi Arabia on January 14, 2011, as thousands of disgruntled Tunisian protestors surrounded his Carthage Palace. The downfall of Ben Ali, only Tunisia's second president in its history, resulted

in radical changes in Tunisian politics and society. These changes would drive a transition from authori-tarian rule toward democracy and, in the process, open the door for a more robust Islamist presence. The toppling of Ben Ali's government, in its own way, facilitated Tunisia's own encounter with the Islamic State.

A month after Ben Ali's departure, the interim government under Fouad Mebazaa, which had assumed control, decreed a general amnesty for political prisoners held under the former regime.[8] While these political prisoners included trade unionists and civil society activists, also in their midst were Islamist radicals who, after serving as foreign fighters in the battlefields of Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, and Somalia, had been jailed upon their return to Tunisia.[9] In addition to the release of these ex-combatants, Ben Ali's overthrow would also allow for the return of Tunisians who had been exiled under the previous administration and lived outside Tunisia.

Among those who returned home from exile was Rachid Ghannouchi. Then 48 years old, Ghannouchi had fled from Tunisia in 1989, having co-founded the Movement of Islamic Tendency (MTI) in 1981, an Islamist organization influenced by the Iranian Revolution of 1979. MTI had its roots in Islamist activism dating back to the late 1960s[10] and oscillated between covert and overt—predominantly non-violent—political activism in the face of state repression. However, political exclusion and the government's repressive policies against MTI, despite its relative moderation, caused some members to form cells and undertake more radical forms of political activity, including the 1987 bombing of four hotels in Sousse and Monastir. A group calling itself Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attacks,[11] although authorities attributed them to MTI members.[12] In February 1989, MTI was renamed Harakat Ennahda, or the Renaissance Movement. Referred to simply as Ennahda, the group remained an Islamist political movement and was among the most vibrant opposition parties operating in Tunisia's repressed political landscape.[13] Although viewed as dangerous by Ben Ali's administration, Ennahda was still allowed to participate as independents in the 1989 elections, winning about 17 percent of the vote.[14] Concerned by the popularity of Ennahda, Ben Ali imposed a massive crackdown leading to the arrest of thousands of the movement's activists and sympathizers along with other political parties and organizations;[15] many more members of Ennahda fled the country. For

his part, Ghannouchi went to London, where he lived in exile for twenty-two years.

After Ben Ali's downfall, Ghannouchi, now protected by the general amnesty of the Mebazaa interim government, returned home to Tunisia on January 30, 2011. Together with cadres who had also benefited from the general amnesty—in addition to party members who had received clemency five years earlier in commemoration of Tunisia's fiftieth Independence Day celebrations[16]—Ghannouchi swiftly reconstituted Ennahda.

A month after Ghannouchi's return, the interim government announced a new round of elections for a constituent assembly—an interim parliament—marking what would be Tunisia's first free elections since its independence in 1956. The outcome of those elections in 2011 saw Ennahda, now led by Ghannouchi, receive a plurality of votes.[17] In the aftermath of Ennahda's electoral victory, Tunisian politics became deeply polarized: the societal discourse was now dominated by the question of the role Islam should play in public life.[18]

Ennahda's assumption of power within the general political opening that the Tunisian Revolution provided was accompanied by the proliferation of Islamist extremist groups and currents in different shapes and in varying forms in public life. Their rise was often ascribed to Ennahda's lack of experience in governing[19] or even its tacit laxity towards radicals,[20] given its rooting in Islamist political leanings, as well as differing ideological proclivities within the party.[21] Although Ennahda had begun in the 1980s as a relatively moderate Islamist party, some cadres on occasion openly expressed their sympathies with more radical Islamists. The latter served as a political base for the newly empowered party, though many secular Tunisians perceived them as an instrument of intimidation employed against those who opposed Ennahda.[22]

With Tunisia now led by Ennahda and the broader "Troika coalition government"[23] of which it was a part—a coalition that promoted, rather than suppressed, conservative Islamism as a political framework—Salafis in Tunisia began to practice *dawa*, or proselytization, overtly.[24] Setting up advocacy tents where prominent Tunisian and foreign Salafi clerics held lectures, they also distributed Salafi literature at markets, and provided social services in the form of food, medicine, and clothing in humanitarian convoys.[25] Together, the interim authorities' decision to release unvetted

prisoners en masse and Ennahda's tolerant and accommodating approach towards Salafi jihadis ultimately provided the opening for the emergence of the Islamic State.[26]

* * *

The Emergence of Ansar al-Sharia and Katibat Uqba bin Nafi

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Tunisia
2011–2013

The renewed prominence of Salafis in Tunisia's political and social life from 2011 occurred in the context of a broader failure to resolve many of the various social issues that had ignited the Arab Uprisings in the first place. Youth unemployment still ran high, as did complaints about marginalization in the country's peripheral areas.[27] The more open environment for radical Islamist activism, coupled with unresolved socio-economic ills, would enable Salafi-jihadist groups to emerge, seeking to engage in violence.

The most prominent of these groups was Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia (AST), or Supporters of Sharia. (This is not to be confused with Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL, chapter 2), which remained a separate organization, despite close ideological, financial, and even operational ties.)[28] AST was conceived as early as 2006 by some twenty jihadis who, imprisoned in Tunisian jails during Ben Ali's regime, began planning for the time when they left jail.[29] Their chance came five years later. When the Revolution swept Tunisia, and formerly imprisoned jihadis were released in March 2011, the group finally came together outside prison. In April, they gathered at the house of their new leader, a man named Sayf Allah Ben Hassine—later known by his *kunya*, Abu Iyadh al-Tunisi—to begin to put their long-term plan into action.[30]

At its inception, AST's goal was simple: to work towards the greater Islamization of Tunisian society. And yet, while its stated purpose was clear enough, the group's path towards that end was far less obvious. On the one

hand, it agreed with al-Qaeda's worldview about the need for the implementation of sharia and a return to greater holiness. On the other hand —and in contrast to al-Qaeda's views—it outwardly rejected jihadist violence,[31] at least in Tunisia at that particular historical moment.[32] Instead, AST adopted a strategy of priming jihad from below, focusing on the Islamization of Tunisian society through missionary work, *dawa*, and particularly the provision of social services,[33] which it believed was more effective than violence for social transformation, especially within the contemporary Tunisian context.[34]

With this mix of pro-sharia outreach and pragmatic non-violence, Ansar al-Sharia set to work. Beginning in approximately April 2011, it began its *dawa* or missionary work in Tunisia by distributing food, medicine, and clothing to the needy. Concurrently, it also worked to promote the Islamization of Tunisian society: it distributed Salafist texts in public markets and organized lectures by prominent Salafist clerics.[35] Yet, Ansar al-Sharia's self-proclaimed rejection of violence proved short-lived.[36]

Although AST was founded in 2011, terror attacks linked to the group did not begin until 2012. The group's first violent action took place in September. In that month, an Egyptian–American named Mark Basseley Youssef, based in the Los Angeles area, released a fourteen-minute film on YouTube entitled "Innocence of Muslims." The film, which one commentator called "Muslim-baiting,"[37] and "a bigoted piece of poison calculated to inflame the Muslim world,"[38] would become the subject of protests around the Muslim world after depicting images of the Prophet Mohammed, as one observer has described them, as "a buffoon, a womanizer, a homosexual, a child molester and a greedy, bloodthirsty thug."[39] According to a *New Yorker* commentator, the film was "intended to offend."[40]

After the release of the controversial film, hundreds of protestors, among them AST members, gathered at the US Embassy in Tunis on September 14, 2012. Led by AST leader Abu Iyadh,[41] rioters broke past police protecting the embassy, forcefully entered and ransacked the compound in Berges du Lac. They lit fires inside the embassy, as well as at a nearby American school, and threw stones and even petrol bombs at police. One observer saw a computer being thrown out a window, while

other protestors simply walked away with laptops looted from the embassy.[42] In the end, two demonstrators were killed, and many more were injured. AST's assault on the embassy came at an already-tense moment: just three days earlier, members of Ansar al-Sharia Libya (ASL) had launched an attack on the US diplomatic compound in Benghazi, which led to the killing of the US ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens.

Since its emergence in 2011, AST had also facilitated the movement of foreign fighters to the Syrian civil war.[43] Relying on the reactivation of extensive recruiting networks of Tunisians that had existed in Iraq and Syria since the wake of the United States' 2003 invasion of Iraq,[44] AST used them to encourage interested Tunisians to go to Syria. Thousands of Tunisians, many of whom were members or sympathizers of AST, traveled to Syria following the 2011 Tunisian Revolution and the emergence of ISIS/ISIL in April 2013. Once in Syria, however, Tunisian foreign fighters experienced the same intra-jihadist splits as their Libyan peers. While many initially fell into the orbit of Jabhat al-Nusra,[45] ultimately thousands joined the incipient Islamic State,[46] with many becoming senior leaders.[47] By all accounts, Tunisia became one of the largest contributors of foreign fighters to the Islamic State. In total, between 2012 and 2013, an estimated 2,900 Tunisians traveled to Iraq and Syria to bolster the future Islamic State's ranks.[48]

In the aftermath of the attacks on the US Embassy in Tunis, radical Islamists became bolder and more defiant of the Tunisian state. Again, in December 2012, Islamists attacked a protest staged by trade unionists in front of the headquarters of the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT) in downtown Tunis. Geoff Porter called the act of violence against the powerful secular labor movement emblematic of an "attack on the whole post-Ben Ali political transition by AST."[49] Two months later, on February 6, 2013, AST's military wing assassinated a leftist and secularist politician, Chokri Belaid, outside his home—the first assassination by firearm of a political figure since the Revolution.[50] This was followed by a second assassination of another secularist politician, Mohamed Brahmi, also outside his home, in July of the same year.[51]

This series of attacks ushered in a sea change in the disposition of the Tunisian government towards the AST, which it had initially tolerated. In August 2013 the Tunisian government labeled AST a banned terrorist

organization.[52] By the time it was proscribed, Ansar al-Sharia had an estimated 10,000 official members[53] and another 100,000 followers.[54] The designation of AST as a terror group brought to light the growing rift within the Islamist movement in Tunisia: Ennahda had now ostracized its Salafist "children" of a younger generation. More importantly, the AST's terrorist designation represented the first *de jure* recognition of the dangers and international connections of the organization.

* * *

Meanwhile, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) had begun to encourage the growth of its own jihadi cell in the Jebel el-Chaambi mountain range in western Tunisia.[55] That cell, called Katibat Uqba bin Nafi, or the Uqba bin Nafi Brigade (KUBN), which eventually attracted AST members, would serve as the basis for the emergence of the Islamic State in Tunisia.

AQIM's venture in Tunisia had begun in the early days after the revolution, which provided it with an opportunity to renew its efforts as the environment became more favorable.[56] During a special report on the program "Tounes El Yaoum" aired by Tunisian television channel Elhiwar Ettounsi, the spokesperson for Tunisia's National Guard, Houssam Eddine Jebebli, explained that KUBN was the result of cooperation between AST's armed wing and AQIM. KUBN—a jihadi militant group named after the general who led the Muslim conquest of the Maghreb in the seventh century—was a group whose creation was directed from above, by AQIM's leader, Abdelmalek Droukdel (chapter 3), in late 2012, following the Tunisian Revolution.[57] Though led by Algerians, it had Tunisian members.[58]

KUBN grew in size in 2013 as the impending Serval Operation conducted by French troops in Mali loomed large. Aware that its Mali-based members were likely soon to be targeted by strikes intended to oust jihadis and non-jihadis from northern Mali (see chapter 7), AQIM (based in Algeria) began to relocate its foreign fighters of both Tunisian and Algerian origin, based in its Mali branch, back to Tunisia, out of harm's way.[59] With AQIM members leaving Mali in late 2012, and AST members dispersing and defecting after the group was proscribed as a terrorist group in the same

year,[60] KUBN's ranks began to grow,[61] and the group itself began to strengthen.

Despite its origins in AQIM's long-standing insurgency throughout much of the Maghreb,[62] KUBN rose to prominence once it was identified as being behind the murder of a member of the Tunisian National Guard, Anis Jelassi, in December 2012.[63] Tunisian authorities revealed intelligence indicating that KUBN was in fact a battalion of AQIM, though KUBN itself would take years to publicly reveal this fact.[64] Despite its origins in al-Qaeda and AQIM, it would be members of Katibat Uqba bin Nafi (some of whom had themselves come from AST) that would ultimately form the base of Tunisia's upstart cell of the Islamic State.

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PART TWO
THE BAYAH PERIOD

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Defections:
Tunisians Pledge Allegiance to the Islamic State

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Tunisia
September 2014–May 2015

Tunisia's cell of the Islamic State would emerge when some members of KUBN—at that time, a presumed, but not confirmed,[65] al-Qaeda affiliate,[66] whose numbers had been boosted by the entry of AST members—defected from the KUBN and pledged *bayah* to the Islamic State.

The first of three major *bayat*[67] to the Islamic State from Tunisia in September 14. In that month, a jihadi media wing called "Ifriqiyah lil-I'lam" ("Africa Media"), which had been founded in mid-2014 to disseminate African jihadi media, from both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State,[68] released a statement of *bayah* that read, in part: "The mujahideen

brothers in KUBN from the land of al-Qayrawan[69] show support, help, and aid from the Islamic Caliphate State … give victory to the Islamic State, raise its banner and unite the ranks of the mujahideen in every place."[70] Importantly, this was the first pledge of allegiance to IS Central from Tunisia, which would later be shown to come from pro-IS members from within KUBN, not from KUBN as a whole.[71] These individual defectors, as Aaron Zelin describes, were, "attempting to agitate for the organization [KUBN] to defect [from al-Qaeda] as well as buttress IS's claims over the homegrown Tunisian jihadi movement."[72]

Important in this first pledge was the role that African Media itself played. While ostensibly promoting an ecumenical vision of Salafi-jihadism —disseminating media in support of both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State[73] —behind the scenes, Africa Media was eager to move the Tunisian needle away from al-Qaeda and towards a closer association with the Islamic State.[74] Africa Media, by disseminating media from both global jihadi groups, sought to "expose their fellow pro-AQ jihadis to IS content" and thus encourage KUBN to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State.[75] Further insight about the nature of the pledge was made available when Ifriqiyah lil i'lam released a statement about the conditions behind the pledge, entitled "And Finally: A Comment on the Bayah That Has Long Been Waited For." In the statement, a Tunisian man tells the story of the initial pledge from Africa Media. In it, he describes how the media house emerged, and how the group had previously coordinated with members of the IS three *wilayat* in Libya (Barqa, Tripolitania, and Fezzan, chapter 2), the *wilaya* in Algeria (al-Jazair, chapter 3), in addition to members of the Islamic State in Greater Sahara (chapter 7). Further, the man noted that friqiyah lil i'lam had previously "made Muslims happy" when it coordinated to achieve the *bayah* from the Islamic State West Africa Province (chapter 6) to the caliph, and later coordinated, remotely, with one of the representatives of the *bayah* of the Islamic State in Greater Sahara to the caliph.[76]

A second major *bayah* from Tunisia three months later came from a group of individuals in late 2014, three months after Africa Media's pledge. In a short audio clip, the persons announced: "We the caliphate soldiers, in beloved Tunisia, declare our *bayah* to the caliph." The exact identities of these men remain unknown, though it is reasonable to suspect that they were pro-IS members from within KUBN. This pledge of *bayah* was met

with silence by IS Central. Soon after these first two unacknowledged pledges of allegiance, insurgents—many of whom were believed to be affiliated to KUBN—began to undertake violent acts in the name of the Islamic State. This violence, as David Gartenstein-Ross and Bridget Moreng have suggested, was intended to raise the group's profile in hopes of earning the status of an official *wilaya* from IS Central.[77] It was, in the vernacular of this book, the insurgents' attempt at affiliate utility validation.

Apart from the first act of violence claimed by Tunisia's "soldiers of the Caliphate," the beheading of a police officer, Hassan Soltani, in December 2014,[78] its first major attack was on the Bardo National Museum in Tunis, one of the most important museums in the Mediterranean, home to one of the largest collections of Roman mosaics in the world. On March 18, 2015, three militants—ultimately discovered to be affiliates of the Islamic State—casually walked into the museum. At the time, the museum complex was hosting around two hundred foreign tourists who had disembarked earlier in the day from the *MSC Splendida* and *Costa Fascinosa*, two cruise liners moored at the capital's port of La Goulette.[79] As the tourists left the tour buses which had brought them from their cruise ships, the militants opened fire on them, forcing scores of tourists to seek sanctuary within the museum.[80] The museum itself was defenseless, as security guards patrolling the complex had just taken their daily coffee break.[81] Facing no opposition, the assailants pursued the tourists into the museum, eventually taking them hostage.[82] The resulting episode saw a siege of several hours, which eventually concluded with security forces breaching the complex and killing two of the assailants, later identified as local Tunisian nationals Yassine Labidi and Saber Khachnaoui.[83] By the end of the assault, twenty foreign tourists and two local nationals had been killed in the attack,[84] and a third, unidentified attacker had evaded capture.

The Islamic State quickly claimed responsibility for the Bardo Museum at-tack.[85] In an audio recording, IS media boasted: "We give you the glad tidings that we are soldiers of the Islamic State in your land—Jund al-Khilafa, soldiers of the Caliph Abu Bakr, may Allah preserve him … Two men from among our soldiers immersed and acted against you and your citizens. So what if we send dozens and dozens?"[86] Elsewhere, a Twitter account linked to the Islamic State posted a picture of Francesco Caldara,

one of the Italian tourists who had been killed in the attack. A red cross covered his body. The caption read: "Crusader crushed."[87] The IS statement taunted: "What you saw is only the first drop of rain."[88]

Of interest here—and rather unique in the broader IS universe—is that IS Central claimed an attack by its soldiers in Tunisia without having publicly accepted a *bayah* from the soldiers in Tunisia. By the time of the Bardo Museum attack in March 2015 neither the first *bayah* (September 2014) nor the second *bayah* (December 2014) had been publicly accepted.[89] In other words, IS Central's treatment of its soldiers in Tunisia was somewhat unconventional: it claimed attacks on behalf of its soldiers before publicly accepting a *bayah* from them. By contrast, in other cases IS Central claimed attacks from "soldiers of the Caliphate" but subsequently granted them provincial status (see ISCAP–DRC in chapter 9 and ISCAP–Mozambique in chapter 10).

Nearly two months after the Bardo attack, a third pledge of *bayah* came from Tunisia from a group that referred to themselves simply as "the soldiers of the Caliphate." In an audio statement and transcript released by IS official media on May 18, 2015, the group stated:

> We/I, the mujahideen of Tunisia, the Kairouan, give *bayah* to Amir al-Muminin [Commander of the Faithful], the Caliph of the Muslims [Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi], pledging to listen and obey, in times of delight and dislike, in times of hardship and ease, and to do so selflessly; and to not dispute the command of those in authority unless we see blatant disbelief [*kufr*], for which we have proof from Allah. And we call upon Muslims everywhere to pledge allegiance to the caliph and support him in obedience of Allah, and to achieve the lost duty of the era.[90]

The third pledge—from defecting members of KUBN, the AQIM outpost in the Tunisian mountains—received recognition on the Islamic State's al-Bayan radio station, on May 19, 2015.[91] However, the pledging group would not be granted the status of *wilaya*. Instead, the group that would ultimately carry out attacks for the Islamic State in Tunisia never formally adopted a name, either self-described or applied. Its members were simply referred to by the generic term for IS members, Jund al-Khilafa, or soldiers of the Caliphate.

What caused this group to defect from KUBN, and pledge allegiance to the Islamic State Central? At the core of these pledges, David Gartenstein-Ross and Bridget Moreng have suggested, was discord within KUBN regarding members' loyalties, whether to al-Qaeda or the Islamic State. In the context of this book, the democratization of jihad was at play. When al-Qaeda finally decided to excommunicate ISIS/ISIL in February 2014, jihadis in Tunisia faced the difficult decision of choosing between the two global movements. More senior members of KUBN were mostly loyal to al-Qaeda, while the lower-level fighters were loyal to the Islamic State. (This trend would also be seen in Sinai, as chapter 4 shows.) Much of it stemmed from the fact that many of the lower-level Tunisian foot soldiers had fought alongside the Islamic State's contingent in Syria before returning back to Tunisia, while KUBN's leadership came from AQIM itself.[92] In sum, the global AQ–IS rift was felt at the local level too. Areas of control in Tunisia's western mountains became delimited according to loyalty to al-Qaeda or the Islamic State. AQIM's KUBN maintained a presence at Mount Chaambi and Semmama in Kasserine, and Ouergha in the Kef Governorate, while the Islamic State's Jund al-Khilafa maintained a presence in Salloum in Kasserine and Mghila, between Kasserine and Sidi Bouzid governorates, and further south at Orbata in the Gafsa Governorate.

In the language of this project, then, the global emergence of the Islamic State served to democratize jihad in Tunisia. KUBN, which had been set up expressly by AQIM, formed the base group for defections and ultimately provided the fighters for the IS cell in Tunisia. By offering an alternative to AQIM's KUBN, the rise of IS Central presented itself as a new and more attractive pole of power for would-be fighters. When these defectors sought affiliate utility validation, at least initially pledges of allegiances were acknowledged, though they were not met with an elevation to provincial status.

* * *

PART THREE
THE POST-BAYAH PERIOD

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The Violence of Jund al-Khilafa: The Islamic State's "Soldiers of the Caliphate" Inside and Outside Tunisia

*

2015–2016

Despite their pledges of allegiance, the soldiers of the caliphate in Tunisia had failed—and would forever fail—to become a province. Yet, three months after the March 2015 Bardo Museum attack, soldiers of the Caliphate launched a second major attack on June 26,[93] this time targeting Tunisia's mainstay tourism sector. The site of the act of mass violence was a stretch of the Port El Kantaoui beachfront, which was expressly built in 1979 to attract tourists to Tunisia, located some ten kilometers from the city of Sousse.[94] Here, on the beachfront adjacent to the Spanish-owned five-star Riu Imperial Marhaba Hotel, the sole assailant, the Tunisian national Seifeddine Rezgui Yacoubi, a 23-year-old computer science student,[95] came disguised as a tourist. At around midday, he retrieved an automatic rifle, which was concealed in his umbrella, and opened fire on the unsuspecting tourists sunbathing on the white sands.[96] Yacoubi then moved from the beachfront to the nearby hotel complex, where he similarly fired on guests and staff manning the foyer.[97] The lone gunman was eventually killed by security forces, but only after claiming the lives of 38 people, 30 of whom were identified as British nationals.[98]

At first, the Islamic State's role in Sousse initially appeared to be less direct than in the Bardo Museum attack: the lone assailant, Seifeddine Rezgui, was not known to be part of any jihadi organization operating in Tunisia or the wider region. Instead, he was initially reported as a self-radicalized "lone wolf" who was inspired to commit the act of mass violence as a result of his interactions with hardline Islamists when he moved to the city of Kairouan, Tunisia, to attend university.[99]

Details later emerged that Rezgui's violence was less spontaneous than at first thought, and that the Islamic State had a more direct role in his actions. Weeks following the attack, a senior security official confirmed that Rezgui had in fact departed from Kairouan and travelled to the Libyan city of Sabratha, where he had received training at an IS-operated camp there.

(More on that camp follows below). The official further claimed that Rezgui had been present at the camp at the same time that the Jund al-Khilafa gunmen involved in the Bardo Museum attack—Labidi and Khachnaoui—were receiving their training. In claiming responsibility for the Port El Kantaoui attack, the Islamic State merely referred to Rezgui by his *nom du guerre* of Abu Yahya al-Qayrawani—a *kunya* meaning "Abu Yahya from Kairouan"—and described him as a "soldier of the Caliphate."[100]

* * *

The third major act of violence undertaken by Jund al-Khilafa came in November 2015. A white bus stood parked on the side of the road on Avenue Mohamed V, a bustling boulevard lined by date palms in downtown Tunis. There, it was waiting to pick up Tunisia's presidential guard, in front of the former headquarters of the Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD), the ruling party during the reign of the former president, Ben Ali. The presidential guards had begun to gather inside and outside the bus, engaged in casual conversations. A man approached the bus's entrance and suddenly an explosion ripped through it, blowing out the roof and the windows. Twelve presidential guard members were killed and nearly twenty others injured. The suicide bomber responsible for the attack had detonated an explosive belt containing an estimated 10 kilograms of Semtex.[101] The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, naming the suicide bomber by his nom de guerre, Abu Abdallah al-Tunisi.[102]

* * *

The Sabratha training camp in neighboring Libya, mentioned above, would prove a vital space for the Islamic State in Tunisia. There, exploiting the post-Gaddafi security vacuum, IS sympathizers from both Libya and Tunisia operated relatively openly, making use of extensive cross-border linkages, and found sympathy among the Tunisian workers' diaspora based in Sabratha. Among other benefits of the Sabratha camp, arms in abundance from the Gaddafi regime's stockpiles provided Tunisian IS militants with a major source of weapons. Given that many of them had a history in cross-

border trade and smuggling,[103] they could with relative ease funnel weapons destined for the IS project into Tunisia. Thus, the Islamic State's implantation in the border area between Tunisia and Libya—replete with substantial weapons caches and logistics hubs[104]—would be vital for the Soldiers of the Caliphate in Tunisia.

Aware of the existence of the camp and its role in training IS affiliates, on February 18, 2016 the US launched airstrikes against the Sabratha cell in Libya.[105] The strike killed an estimated 41 people,[106] including dozens of Tunisians,[107] reportedly among them Tunisian Noureddine Chouchane. Chouchane, whom the Pentagon accused of facilitating both the Bardo Museum and the Port El Kantaoui attacks, was also reportedly planning similar acts of violence against US interests in Tunisia.[108] In the aftermath of the punishing strike, the IS training camp in Sabratha sustained significant damage and loss of leadership.[109] It is estimated that JAK lost approximately one-quarter of its fighters. Its losses would not end there: after the strike, tensions mounted between the IS militants and local Libyan forces, and escalated into deadly clashes. At this point, the militants had their backs to the wall: should they continue to fight or disband? They decided on the former, leading them to pursue what Aaron Zelin has referred to as their "go-for-broke moment."[110] This ambitious plan, grounded in the belief that Tunisia was ripe for assimilation into parts of the caliphate which had been carved out, but lost, in neighboring Libya,[111] involved a full-on, IS Central-inspired assault on the city of Ben Guerdane in Tunisia.

* * *

A Failed Takeover:
The Soldiers of the Caliphate's Assault on Ben Guerdane

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Ben Guerdane, Tunisia
March 7, 2016

Located a mere thirty kilometers from the Libyan border, Ben Guerdane, a trading town with an estimated 80,000 inhabitants, has long been viewed as a microcosm of Tunisia's socio-political and economic problems. Here, unemployment is exceptionally high, particularly among its youth, and much of the town's economy is centered around the smuggling of goods, fuel, arms and even people across the porous Tunisia–Libya border.[112] Decades of chronic state neglect and socio-economic malaise had led to the growing advocacy of religiously informed governance.[113]

On the morning of March 7, 2016, Jund al-Khilafa—estimated to have more than a hundred[114] fighters in total—launched an assault on the city. The operation began in the pre-dawn hours,[115] not with violence, but with a call from the loudspeaker of the Jalal Mosque. Instead of a call to prayer, it broadcast the initiation of an offensive on Ben Guerdane by soldiers of the Caliphate. Chanting "God is the Greatest"—*Allahu akhbar*—the message informed the citizens of Ben Guerdane that the Islamic State was prepared to rescue them from the "tyrant" army of Tunisia.[116] Hearing the call, dozens of IS-aligned militants, some in up-armored vehicles,[117] entered the streets of Ben Guerdane in the early morning, around five or six. Many of the soldiers were residents—weapons caches had been pre-planted throughout the town[118]—though some new fighters had also apparently arrived from Libya,[119] many of them having previously trained in the Sabratha training camps.[120] Tribal jockeying was also at play, as members of the R'baya tribe made up a disproportionate number of the Ben Guerdane attackers.[121]

With the call to begin the siege, members of Jund al-Khilafa began their attempt to launch a full-fledged takeover of Ben Guerdane, mimicking the IS Central's "Breaking the Borders" moment between Iraq and Syria back in June 2014,[122] as well as sieges by IS affiliates in Derna and Sirte, Libya, in Sheikh Zuweid, Sinai, and later in Qandala, Somalia.

With the assault under way, members of Jund al-Khilafa—clad in military fatigues and wielding Kalashnikovs as well as rocket-propelled grenades—established checkpoints on roads leading in and out of Ben Guerdane[123] and within the city itself,[124] to check the identification cards of those moving around the city.[125] Before long, dozens of armed assailants surrounded the town, handing out weapons to militants from a moving

truck,[126] as well as offering weapons to those who might be sympathetic to their cause and ready to fight alongside them.[127]

IS militants also targeted citizens who had shown collaboration with the Tunisian state. One man, Hussein Abdul Kabir, told the *Washington Post* how militants planned a deadly ambush of his brother, Abdul Athi, who, as the head of Ben Guerdane's counterterror brigade, was killed after militants emerged from the house next to his at six on the morning of the siege.[128] Elsewhere in town, at a cafe, Islamic State militants removed and executed a customs agent from his car after his identification card revealed his identity as an employee of the Tunisian state.[129] One of the perpetrators told the owner of the cafe, Mohamed Ali: "Tomorrow, we will be ruling you."[130] In addition to targeting statist collaborators, IS militants attacked the town's police station and an army barracks, and conducted raids on farms.[131]

Despite these attacks on those associated with the Tunisian state, members of Jund al-Khilafa attempted to assure regular citizens of their safety.[132] As Hassein Taba, resident of Ben Guerdane, told a Reuters reporter: "We came across a group of terrorists with their Kalashnikovs, and they told us: 'Don't worry we are not here to target you. We are the Islamic State and we are here for the tyrants in the army.'"[133] In another instance, Salim Dhawi said that as he was hiding in a cell phone shop during the siege, an IS fighter assured him: "Don't worry. We are the Islamic State. We are here to protect you from this non-believer government."[134]

As the attack unfolded, the Tunisian state mobilized regular and specialized units of the police, the National Guard, and army. Violent clashes between government and militant forces in Ben Guerdane continued until midday.[135] Hundreds of security service personnel surrounded the town, securing buildings and searching for the IS affiliate members. By the end of the day, the Tunisian state successfully retook the town, killing some 55 militants and arresting 52 others,[136] all of whom were Tunisian. Twelve security service members were also killed during the operation. In the course of their siege, members of Jund al-Khilafa killed eight civilians in Ben Guerdane.[137] To underscore the importance of the raid's ultimate failure, the events are annually commemorated in Tunisia as the "Ben Guerdane epic [battle],"[138] while March 7 has been declared the National Victory over Terrorism Day.[139]

Although the assault on Ben Guerdane had failed to achieve its objective of an IS takeover, it nevertheless highlighted the ambitions of members of the Islamic State in Tunisia. What, then, were the rationales for the attack? One theory is that, the assault on Ben Guerdane was likely undertaken to establish an area of influence straddling the borders between Tunisia and Libya, particularly after the punishing US airstrikes the month before. Another rationale is that the attack was likely a way to show fealty to or reverence towards the IS Central, mimicking, or at least attempting to mimic, the sorts of territorial takeovers consistent with its brand of "remaining and expanding." Yet, this would not prove sufficient to earn it the status of a province.

* * *

The Wilaya That Never Was:
Interpreting Tunisia's Non-Provincial Rise

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Tunisia
June 2014–October 2019

While Jund al-Khilafa's acts of violence—at the Bardo Museum in Tunis, at the resort in Sousse, on the bus in Tunis, and in the assault on Ben Guerdane—between 2014 and 2016 were undertaken in order to achieve affiliate utility validation to IS Central and attain the status of *wilaya*, this recognition never occurred. The closest that IS Central came to calling Tunisia a *wilaya* was in its magazine *Dabiq* in June 2015, in which it referred to "two even bloodier strikes" that "were carried out in Tunisia and Kuwait by *wilayat* of the Islamic State," thus implying that it might be considering Tunisia as a *wilaya*. This statement seems to be the result of a lack of coordination within IS Central rather than an actual declaration of elevation. Thus, despite being referred to as such in IS Central propaganda, Tunisia never officially became an IS *wilaya*, and thus never achieved the final stage of affiliate utility validation.

This seems perplexing. If affiliate utility validation is defined as the process by which prospective provinces needed to prove to IS Central that

they could provide meaningful benefits to the group's overall trajectory, then in sundry respects, Tunisia would seem to fit the bill. Indeed, Tunisian IS militants contributed at all levels to the Islamic State's overall effort. Over time, they would constitute a major pipeline of fighters to the organization.[140] Moreover, Tunisia-based militants played a crucial role in the Islamic State's regional outreach in northwest Africa, coordinating communications with prospective affiliates, including helping to coordinate Boko Haram's pledge in Nigeria (chapter 6). In addition, members of the Tunisian group would also play fundamental roles in the coordination of IS attacks in Europe, having some involvement, for instance, in the 2016 Berlin Christmas market truck attack, the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing, and in the Islamic State's external operations networks more broadly in Belgium, France, and Italy.[141]

What factors then lay at the core of this inability for IS adherents in Tunisia to achieve "affiliate utility validation" and become an official Islamic State *wilaya*? First, the timing of pledges in Tunisia is arguably the most salient. Indeed, it is important to consider the particular historical moment in which IS Tunisia was operating. IS Central granted *wilaya* status to five African provinces at once in November 2014: three in Libya (chapter 2), one in Algeria (chapter 3), and one in Sinai (chapter 4). While the first two pledges in 2014 may have emerged at the right time, given that they came from only a minority of members from a relatively small al-Qaeda outfit, IS Central may well have viewed them as unsustainable. By the time the third bayah known to have come from soldiers defecting from KUBN occurred in May 2015, nearly a year after the Islamic State's declaration of a caliphate in June 2014, the soldiers in Tunisia may be considered to have missed the boat and in benefitting from the earlier days of a much more lenient process of "affiliate utility validation." As articulated, following the first wave of African province acceptances, IS Central appears, between 2015 and 2018, to have become more stringent in its process of acceptance. By the time that the KUBN militants were pledging in May 2015, IS Central had already seen the leader of its province in Algeria, Abdelmalek Gouri, killed by airstrikes in December 2014 (chapter 3), leaving Wilayat al-Jazair to struggle. Around the same time, in the first six months of 2015, IS Central was also presumably preoccupied with the success of its next-door Libyan project (chapter 2), and, simultaneously, was in the process of courting Boko Haram in Nigeria and setting it up as the Islamic State West

Africa Province further south (chapter 6). Collectively, these phenomena likely conspired to make IS Central reason that it was not in its strategic interest to add yet one more province to its list.

In addition to the Islamic State's grand strategic outlook, factors internal to Tunisia itself may well have been at play in impeding the emergence of a *wilaya*. Perhaps most importantly, members of the Jund al-Khilafa never found wide-ranging support among local populations,[142] and, in the absence of such support, its fighting base remained small.[143] It never held or governed territory in any meaningful way, nor was the tempo and breadth of its attacks ever particularly impressive. Despite moments of violence, its longevity was not a foregone conclusion. Simultaneously, the Tunisian counterterror effort, beginning in approximately 2014, became much tighter. Although the post-revolution era saw a newly permissive environment for Islamists and jihadis, following the designation of AST as a terror group in 2013 and the subsequent crackdown, the Tunisian government became much stricter in monitoring and attempting to prohibit jihadi movements, an early sign of the challenges that a would-be province might face.

Finally, it is also important to note that while Tunisia was indeed a keen generator of sympathizers for the Islamic State, many of these jihadis elected to leave Tunisia rather than direct their efforts internally. On one hand, Tunisians left the country in droves to serve as foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria, both prior to 2014 and after: as noted, Tunisia would serve as the top global provider of foreign fighters to Iraq and Syria, with many assuming leadership positions there,[144] and most of the mobilization happened between March 2013 and June 2014.[145] On the other hand, other Tunisians left the country for Libya: the post-Qaddafi landscape of neighboring Libya, with its own highly successful *wilayat* between 2014 and 2016, was an attractive and proximate outlet, offering would-be jihadis a far more permissive security environment to be part of the Islamic State without facing the same risks as they did at home.[146] Resultantly, Tunisia experienced what might be considered a "jihadi brain-drain" to Iraq, Syria, and Libya: those members that might have been able to establish a *wilaya* there would end up contributing to the Islamic State's development outside, rather than inside, Tunisia.

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The Islamic State in Tunisia at the Time of al-Baghdadi's Death

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Tunisia
October 2019

At the moment of al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019, the Islamic State in Tunisia—which was never declared a *wilaya*, and whose members were simply described as "soldiers of the Caliphate"—remained as much an ideological recruitment network as it did an actual, tangible group. Following its rise between 2015 and 2016, the Islamic State's presence in Tunisia declined precipitously. Between 2015 and 2018, the soldiers had claimed only twenty-three attacks: eleven in 2015, four in 2016, four in 2017, four in 2018,[147] and five as of July 2019,[148] just three months before al-Baghdadi's death. Instead, Tunisians' participation in the Islamic State project tended to occur outside Tunisia itself—either in Iraq and Syria as foreign fighters, or from a base in neighboring Libya. Nevertheless, the insurgency in Tunisia's western mountains, simultaneously driven by Jund al-Khilafa and al-Qaeda-affiliated militants, remained small and contained. Despite the provincial snub, members of Jund al-Khilafa pledged allegiance to the new caliph, al-Qurayshi, soon after al-Baghdadi's death, releasing their statement on November 6, 2019.[149]

The process of emergence of the IS cell in Tunisia followed many of the same patterns seen in other IS branches. The Jund al-Khalifa emerged in a Muslim majority country that, prior to the Islamic State's global emergence, already had a vibrant Islamist community and transnationally jihadi connections. Like other states where IS provinces would emerge, Tunisia had also been recently beset by political instability in the form of the 2011 Tunisian Revolution. Al-Qaeda sympathizers from AST and AQIM's KUBN combined with returned foreign fighters involved in various jihadi theaters around the world, to serve as the initial pool of recruits for the Islamic State. The Islamic State's global emergence helped democratize jihad in Tunisia, as it would elsewhere on the continent, allowing members of KUBN to abandon their own upstart AQIM branch and try to make it

alone as an IS branch. As elsewhere, IS Central met the pledges from Tunisians with acknowledgement but no province, referring to them simply as Jund al-Khilafa. Even after major attacks in Tunisia in 2015 and 2016, IS Central would never grant Tunisians the status of maintaining an official *wilaya*.

And yet, despite the lack of recognition, it is perhaps incorrect to think of Tunisian militants as being entirely independent from IS Central. While it is true that, as a non-province, the group's ability to act formally as a "subordinate" was minimal anyway, the Jund al-Khalifa nevertheless was in communication with IS Central, cooperated significantly with other IS branches in Africa, and may even have received funding, though this is unverified.[150] Though in some ways even more "sovereign" than other IS provinces in Africa, ironically, the non-province affiliate in Tunisia was also arguably even more an integral part of the broader IS network than more peripheral provinces like those in Somalia or Greater Sahara.

6

THE ISLAMIC STATE'S WEST AFRICA PROVINCE

PART ONE
THE PRE-BAYAH PERIOD

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A Helmet Law, an Uprising, and the Death of a Preacher

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Northeastern Nigeria
July 2009

On June 11, 2009, police stopped members of a funeral procession in the city of Maiduguri, the capital of northeastern Nigeria's Borno state. After a skirmish, the authorities ended up firing on members in the procession, ultimately wounding or killing some seventeen people. Their infraction: some of the procession's members had failed to wear motorcycle helmets in accordance with a law that had been instituted in late 2008. Disdain for the law came from motorcycle (or "*okada*" or "*achaba*") riders—many of whom could scarcely afford such helmets and some of whom said that the helmets prevented the proper wearing of headdresses.[1] In protest, some

wore dried pumpkins, tires, or pots in mockery of the law.[2] At the same time that the authorities imposed the helmet law, they initiated an anti-banditry program, Operational Flush II, intended to address the rising thefts that had occurred on northeastern Nigeria's highways.[3] But whereas the helmet law met with playful mockery at first, both it and Operation Flush II soon came to be understood, at least by some, as pretexts to surveil, harass, and extort members of civil society, including members of a growing—and increasingly threatening—movement led by a local cleric named Mohammed Yusuf.

Yusuf was, in 2009, an imam in the Ibn Taymiyya Mosque, which he had founded in 2002, near the railway station in Maiduguri.[4] Previously, he had served as an imam at the Ndimi Mosque[5] until 2001 or 2002.[6] At the core of Yusuf's popularity was his intertwined anti-statist and anti-Western sermons, which he combined with an ethos of targeted social outreach to the most marginalized members of Maiduguri. The plight of Maiduguri's most destitute, Yusuf argued, was the result of the overlapping forces of British colonialism, the generally secular, postcolonial Nigerian state to which it gave rise, and the cadre of corrupt Nigerian elites which oversaw that state's management. Chronic theft by avaricious elites of the state, Yusuf preached, had led to the destitution of many in Maiduguri specifically and in northeastern Nigeria broadly, one of the most underdeveloped regions of the country.[7]

To fix these ills, Yusuf argued, sharia law needed to be instituted, in its totality, across his native state of Borno, in addition to the neighboring administrative divisions of Adamawa and Yobe.[8] This notion was not entirely radical. Between 1999 and 2001, twelve northern Nigerian states, all predominantly Muslim, had already begun the process of institutionalizing sharia, to varying degrees and in differing domains. As Yusuf preached these ideals, his following grew. One claim—specious as it may be—suggested that at one point he had some 300,000 followers across Nigeria, Niger, and Chad.[9]

As Yusuf's popularity grew, so did his political currency. When Nigeria entered its 2003 general election cycle, Yusuf was persuaded to use his notoriety to support a candidate for the governorship of Borno state, Ali Modu Sheriff, in exchange for Sheriff agreeing to deepen the application of sharia law and incorporate Yusuf and his followers into his government if

he won.[10] While a win in 2003 saw Sheriff grant a post to Yusuf's follower Alhaji Buji Foi, when he won again in 2007 Sheriff reneged on his promises to Yusuf and his followers[11]—by that time increasingly known as the *yusufiya*—whose anti-statist worldview continued to be vindicated by reality.[12] Between 2007 and 2009, Yusuf's once mostly non-violent rhetoric was replaced with more vocal advocacy of confrontation with the state.[13] Skirmishes between his supporters and security forces became more common. The *yusufiya* attacked state institutions, prisons, and police stations especially, and when arrested, Yusuf's supporters also took to helping their comrades break out of jail. Tensions rose in this way—with Yusuf denouncing state structures, his supporters attacking these structures, and security services undertaking reprisals against the *yusufiya*—through early 2009.[14]

The culmination of the long-brewing confrontation between police and members of Yusuf's movement (then referred to by external observers as Mohammed Yusuf Islamic Movement (MYIM) and not yet as Boko Haram)[15] came on that day in June 2009, when the funeral convoy was stopped, and its members were hurt or killed. As a cable from the US Embassy in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, would note: "If any of the wounded MYIM members should die, we believe the risk of violence would increase significantly, as the [MYIM] sect will likely retaliate. The fact that an anti-robbery task force chose to stop motorcyclists during a funeral procession for traffic violations and riding without helmets is curious and suggests the possibility that the officers of Operation Flush were deliberately seeking to provoke the group."[16]

In response to the funeral procession incident, Yusuf released an "Open Letter to the Federal Government of Nigeria," a call for uprisings against authorities in both Abuja and Borno,[17] claiming that the targeting of his followers under the auspices of the helmet law and anti-banditry campaign was clear evidence that the state was unjustly singling out Muslims.[18] As Alex Thurston has said, "Yusuf sought to activate Muslims' feelings that different groups—Christians, the state, the West—had humiliated Muslims inside Nigeria and around the world. The conflict he called for would be existential and total."[19]

The offensive that Yusuf had called for began on July 26, 2009. On that date, an estimated 70 followers[20] attempted to storm police stations in two northeastern Nigerian cities, Bauchi (in Borno state) and Potiskum (in Yobe state).[21] In response, police raided a shantytown in Bauchi, believed to harbor group members, killing an estimated 55 and arresting 200 more.[22] The next day, *yusufiya* members stormed the police headquarters, two other police stations, and a prison in Maiduguri, leading to a street battle between Yusuf's followers and security forces. On July 28, members attempted to burn a police station in Katsina (in Katsina state).[23] Meanwhile, the military deployed what observers claimed were six armored tanks plus five additional military trucks to the Railways Quarters neighborhood of Maiduguri, to raid Yusuf's mosque and headquarters.[24] On July 29, security forces attempted to raid Yusuf's house, though they did not find him.

Instead, they located him the next day at his in-laws' house, hiding in a goat pen.[25] While accounts differ on what occurred next,[26] it is believed that after Yusuf was arrested and interrogated by police, he was executed behind the police station in Maiduguri.[27] Soon, images of Yusuf—lying in the dirt, his stomach shot multiple times—began to circulate. When the dust from the violence—subsequently often referred to as the Maiduguri Uprisings—settled, between 800[28] and 1,000[29] followers of the *yusufiya* movement had been killed, as had its founding leader, Mohammed Yusuf.[30]

Following the protests by the *yusufiya* and the killing of Yusuf himself, a harsher crackdown on Boko Haram's remaining membership ensued.[31] Faced with new pressure by the state, Yusuf's followers fled northeastern Nigeria's major urban centers to the region's rural hinterlands. One of the places chosen as a refuge was the Sambisa Forest, in the Chad Basin National Park. There, vindicated in their belief of the state's transgressions, the group's remaining members began plotting vengeance. There, an even more radical—and profoundly more violent—version of the movement that Yusuf had started would soon emerge.

* * *

The Yusufiya after Yusuf: The Rise of Abubakar Shekau

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Northeastern Nigeria
2000s

While hiding in the Sambisa Forest in the aftermath of the Maiduguri Uprisings for the remainder of 2009 and into 2010, the organization that would come to be known as Boko Haram (roughly meaning "Western education is forbidden") went quiet and ceased to carry out violence. Though dispersed, the *yusufiya* were not forgotten: local authorities worried about a return to insecurity.[32] As journalist Mike Smith said of his time speaking to government officials in Maiduguri nearly a year after the uprisings: "Even uttering the words 'Boko Haram' was illegal."[33]

Yet, an important question remained: with Yusuf having been killed, just who was at the helm of the new, reinvigorated group? The man who came to fill the void left by Yusuf's death was Abu Mohammed Abubakar bin Mohammad al-Sheikawi, or Abubakar Shekau. Shekau—who assumed the helm as leader of the group and also become the first leader of the Islamic State's West Africa Province—had been appointed to that position after Yusuf pronounced him his number two in command while he was being interrogated in prison on the day that he died.[34] Shekau was roughly the same age as Yusuf—having been born in about 1970 in Yobe state.[35] As a young boy, Shekau was an *almajiri*: a typical young Nigerian boy sent by his family to school in one of the major towns and cities in Nigeria's north, where a *malam*, or teacher, coaches dozens, sometimes hundreds, of male students, to memorize the entire Quran and learn Islamic theology. Often living in destitution and begging for alms to provide basic sustenance, these so-called street children are often illiterate and uneducated in the formal schooling system, and they form a youth "underclass."[36] According to several observers, this kind of life, combining poverty and an often conservative, Quranic-based anti-statist ideology, makes the *almajirai* in northeastern Nigeria particularly vulnerable to radicalization.[37]

After serving as an *almajiri*, Shekau studied for some time at the High Islam Institute in Maiduguri, which was run by the Tijani Sufi fraternity.[38] Shekau later left the institute before completing his studies, and met some Salafi scholars, one of whom was Yusuf himself. Shekau subsequently

became one of Yusuf's most ardent followers and the two struck up a brotherly relationship.[39] "Since Shekau met with Mohammed Yusuf, I didn't see him again," Shekau's mother told the Voice of America reporters years later.[40]

After Yusuf had broken away from the dominant Sunni movement in northern Nigeria—known as the Izala—and begun preaching independently, it is said that he entrusted some of his proselytization to Shekau, whose simple yet passionate sermons found resonance with large numbers of people within the Maiduguri community.[41] Shekau was also said to have gained significant respect from others for his piety and asceticism: because of his simple attire and tastes, and refusal to accept gifts —he was reportedly offered, and rejected, a vehicle as a gift from members of the *yusufiya*—he was revered by the sect's followers and its leaders. So much did Yusuf admire Shekau that the Islamic State would years later note in its internal documents that Yusuf had "elevated [Shekau] above all other preachers, had drawn him close, and had started to appoint [Shekau] as his deputy whenever he would travel."[42]

Thus, after Yusuf was killed in July 2009 during the Nigerian government's crackdown, Shekau set to work to rebuild the movement. Initially, his ascent to leadership was an imperative and welcome development: giving coherence, leadership, and motivation to what one writer has called the "dispersed and demoralized followers of Yusuf" after the 2009 crackdown. Shekau also began to use the name Jama'atu Ahil as-Sunna li ad-Da'wa wa al-Jihad (JAS, or People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad)[43] for the group, though it continued to be colloquially known as Boko Haram. By August 2010, Boko Haram announced that Shekau was the new leader.[44]

Quiet but far from defunct, Boko Haram would, soon after the announcement of Shekau as its new leader, realize the worst fears of local authorities. On September 7, 2010, under the leadership of Shekau, Boko Haram members armed with AK-47s and homemade bombs raided a prison in Bauchi, roughly 400 kilometers southwest of Maiduguri. Shouting "*Allahu Akbar*," they freed 721 prisoners, of whom approximately 150 were believed to be Boko Haram members.[45] While Boko Haram had been mostly dormant for more than a year after Yusuf's killing, it was now active again. With a new leader an accession of new members from the prison

raid, and a litany of anti-statist charges that had originally animated Yusuf's violence still in its pocket, the new Boko Haram quickly made a name for itself for its unrivaled brutality.

After the Bauchi Prison incident in September 2010, Boko Haram's violence escalated. On one hand, it showed a propensity to directly attack known enemies of the group, especially local police: its members destroyed, for instance, a police station in Maiduguri in October.[46] On the other, it became engaged in targeting spaces like bars that served alcohol, which contravened its interpretation of sharia.[47] Christian houses of worship also became particularly vulnerable: two churches in Maiduguri were attacked on Christmas Eve 2010, killing at least six people,[48] while on Christmas Day 2011 the group attacked churches as well as other locales in at least four cities or towns, leaving forty people dead.[49] Boko Haram under Shekau had become a menace to both institutions of the state and civilians alike.[50]

In 2011, Boko Haram again flexed its operational muscles, showing that its area of reach extended far outside its homeland of northeastern Nigeria. On June 16, 2011, Boko Haram attacked the National Police Headquarters in Abuja. An estimated six people were killed, including the bomber, in what is believed to have been the first-ever suicide bombing in Nigeria: "We are responsible for the bomb attack on the police headquarters in Abuja which was to prove a point to all those who doubt our capability," read a statement from Boko Haram.[51] Its targeting of potent national symbols in the capital, Abuja, would continue. On August 26, less than two months later, Boko Haram sent two suicide bombers to the United Nations' Nigerian headquarters, also in Abuja. Breaching the security barrier surrounding the building, a car careened into the lobby of the UN headquarters. Twenty-three people were killed,[52] and more than seventy injured.[53]

Folake Oluokun was working in the building with the UN Development Program that day. As she would recall in 2019: "The force of the bomb lifted me off my feet and threw me on my back. I landed a few meters away from the window that I had been standing by just a few seconds prior. I thought I was dead." She continued:

> The office was totally dark and silent … From the force of the blast, the entire window I was standing next to had popped out from its frames and had landed on top of me. I rose to my feet. Along with other colleagues, we created a hole in the glass of the emergency exit door … We climbed through the hole in the exit door one after the other, walked down the building's side stairs and made our way towards the front of the building. Eventually, after we had left the building and the reality of what had happened gradually sank in, the shock started to gradually evolve into hysteria. Some people were weeping, others were trying to reach colleagues over the phone to confirm their whereabouts … My shock and confusion gave way to anger. Why were they doing this? What had any of us done to them? All these lives lost and so many people injured just to make a statement?[54]

The bombing, it was later revealed, had been masterminded by one Mamman Nur,[55] a man who would figure prominently into the history and evolution of Boko Haram and ISWAP for years to come, and who, after the bombing, had a $175,000 bounty placed on his head.[56] With the 2011 attacks in Abuja, Boko Haram made it known that the new iteration of Yusuf's organization was far from dormant.

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Boko Haram and al-Qaeda

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Northeastern Nigeria
2003–2014

Years before Boko Haram under Shekau began to make itself a household name in Nigeria, it started communicating with the preeminent jihadi pole of power in the broader West Africa region: al-Qaeda. To understand why Boko Haram would eventually pledge allegiance to IS Central, we need to examine why it had such relatively tenuous relations with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

Al-Qaeda had long looked on Nigeria as ripe for joining the global jihad. In 2003, Osama bin Laden declared that Nigeria was one of the most "qualified regions of jihad."[57] It was revealed, years later, that he had given a Nigerian named Muhammed Ali some $3 million in 2002 to create a start-up al-Qaeda cell.[58] Some of this money made its way to Yusuf.[59] And yet, though Yusuf's group was inspired by al-Qaeda and included members with connections to AQIM, Yusuf operated independently from AQIM.[60]

Some of the first details about Shekau's attempts to forge a relationship with al-Qaeda's Saharan franchise, AQIM, were revealed in November 2011. In that month, documents seized during the May 2011 raid on former al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, were declassified.[61] Among the cache of documents released by the United States Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) were letters between Abdelhamid Abou Zeid, a slain commander of AQIM, and Abdelmalek Droukdel (see chapter 3), the leader of al-Qaeda's North Africa branch.[62] In one of the exchanges written in August 2009, Abou Zeid detailed how Shekau had dispatched a three-member mission[63] to Algeria, the birthplace of AQIM, to establish ties and set up a long-term means of communication between himself and Droukdel.[64] Of note, the timing of these communications—just the month following Yusuf's death in July 2009—underlines Shekau's quick turn towards al-Qaeda. This trend of local groups seeking deeper affiliation with global parent groups upon loss of leadership would also be seen in the case of Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM) in Sinai (chapter 4) and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in Congo (chapter 9), though they both turned towards the Islamic State, not al-Qaeda.

In addition to Shekau's desire to establish contact with AQIM's leadership, Boko Haram also requested assistance with funding, training, and expertise, such as bomb-making and waging tactical asymmetric armed campaigns.[65] The communiqués further detailed how AQIM leader Droukdel established contact with Shekau in 2009,[66] and welcomed the idea of forging a relationship between AQIM and Boko Haram, going so far as to pledge and assist the latter with its training.[67] Subsequently released documents showed that AQIM had indicated its willingness to assist Boko Haram by providing Shekau with 200,000 euros in funding as an initial

payment, in addition to giving caches of arms, which al-Qaeda's Saharan branch had secured in Mauritania.[68] These initial interactions were seemingly beneficial to Boko Haram: as Andrea Brigaglia asserts, between 2010 and 2011 AQIM provided "intense military training and occasional financial help" to Shekau's group.[69]

Underscoring the apparent desire for Boko Haram to enter al-Qaeda's orbit, a second letter from the Bin Laden cache (of unknown date) was written by Shekau and addressed to Osama bin Laden himself.[70] In it, Shekau requested a meeting with Bin Laden's deputy (now al-Qaeda's current leader), Ayman al-Zawahiri. Equally importantly, in this letter, Shekau also sought instruction on how his movement, Boko Haram, could form part of al-Qaeda's transnationalist network.[71] There is currently no evidence confirming whether Bin Laden ever responded to Shekau's requests. Likewise, there is no evidence to suggest that Shekau ever swore fidelity to either Bin Laden (by the time of his death in 2011) or, subsequently, al-Zawahiri.

Despite these initial expressions of amity between Boko Haram and al-Qaeda and AQIM between 2009 and mid-2011, the relationship would sour by late 2011.[72] Why did Boko Haram and AQIM (and al-Qaeda more broadly) fail to develop a deeper relationship, particularly one that would have cemented Boko Haram as an official al-Qaeda affiliate, and perhaps have halted Boko Haram's subsequent turn toward the Islamic State several years later?

At least one reason was provided in a second cache of AQIM letters released six years after the first cache, in 2017,[73] which detailed a series of exchanges between Shekau, his followers, and AQIM, also between 2009 and 2011. While a degree of amity and cooperation seemingly marked the exchanges between AQIM and Boko Haram, these letters indicated that a early shift had occurred by October 2011 in their relations.[74] At the heart of the growing distance between AQIM and Boko Haram were accusations made about Shekau as a leader, particularly his interpretations of Islam. Eventually, a group of dissidents[75] from within the Boko Haram leadership, or shura council, sent AQIM leaders letters accusing Shekau's leadership of being incompatible with the tenets of Islam. The core criticism that the dissidents levied against the Boko Haram leader was his habit of excommunicating Nigerian Muslims who continued to reside in areas under

the control of the Nigerian government, on one hand, and who failed to seek affiliation with Boko Haram following the July 2009 Maiduguri Uprisings,[76] on the other. Shekau's belief that these communities—who lived in proximity to Boko Haram but who were not explicitly its supporters—were *kuffar* (or non-believers) was then used to justify acts of violence against civilians, almost entirely Muslims.

In addition to complaints of Shekau's extreme interpretation of *takfir* and its application towards civilians, the dissidents also complained to AQIM of Shekau's violence against Boko Haram members who themselves had challenged the ideology undergirding his leadership.[77] They claimed that Shekau was prone to banishing those who challenged his claim to the "spoils of war" to which he felt personally entitled as Boko Haram leader, to the exclusion of others in the group.[78] They also complained of his decision to forbid his followers to wage jihad in "foreign," non-Nigerian (or non-Lake Chad Basin) lands, particularly Somalia and Algeria, which had emerged as key battlefields for aspirant African jihadi fighters.[79] The internal dissidents also disliked Shekau's self-promotion in the hierarchy of the group: Shekau had elevated himself from the rank of imam to caliph, and used his status to provide further ideological justification for why his words and deeds were beyond reproach.[80] And while AQIM sought, in line with al-Qaeda's broader ethos, to target Western and Christian entities in Nigeria, Shekau was more inclined to hit at the Nigerian government and other Muslims.[81] AQIM also complained that Shekau was prone to broadcasting the group's secrets in his public addresses.[82]

Leading the charge against Shekau was Mamman Nur, the mastermind of the August 2011 Nigerian UN headquarters bombings. Indeed, these strains of dissent came from an important figure within the group. According to one of the most widely accepted origin stories of Boko Haram, Nur himself had introduced Yusuf to Shekau, and had also briefly served as the leader of the sect following Yusuf's death.[83] Nur, who ultimately married one of Yusuf's widows,[84] and was believed to be one of a few senior Boko Haram commanders with higher education,[85] is also thought to have spent time fighting among the ranks of regional jihadi movements such as AQIM and the Somali-based al-Shabaab[86]—where he was allegedly taught the art of bomb-making[87]—as well as in Sudan.[88] So

powerful was Nur within Boko Haram that he was presumed to be third in line to command the group after Yusuf's death.[89] In all these ways, Nur's complaints to AQIM over Shekau's leadership worked against Boko Haram's formal affiliation to al-Qaeda.

Following the litany of complaints leveled against Shekau by Boko Haram members, AQIM—which, again, only offered guidance and material assistance, but facilitated no formal al-Qaeda branch affiliation for Boko Haram—contacted Shekau to suggest that he answer the charges of which he had been accused by Nur and others. Unrepentant, Shekau ignored al-Qaeda's suggestions, denying accusations of his un-Islamic leadership. This intransigence did not satisfy al-Qaeda, which remained in correspondence with members of Boko Haram's shura council who had initially raised their dissatisfaction with Shekau's leadership.[90]

For their part, the dissidents, realizing that Shekau was unlikely to change his stripes, struck out and, in 2012, formed their own breakaway Boko Haram faction called Ansaru.[91] Announcing its formation in the city of Kano in February 2012, the Boko Haram offshoot retained ties with AQIM,[92] and continued to denounce Shekau's leadership of the sect as un-Islamic.[93] At its core, Ansaru's formation was motivated by Shekau's penchant for gratuitous violence against Muslim civilians, his inability to handle criticism and, most significantly, the poor theological justification for his misguided leadership.[94] And yet, despite this splintering, Shekau retained the vast majority of the original group's fighters.[95]

And thus, after several years of flirtation, Boko Haram did not become an al-Qaeda branch in Nigeria, even while it proved its capacity for violence. Instead, dissidents had broken away with the support of AQIM to form Ansaru, and Shekau, brutal, indiscriminate, and reviled as he was by some, remained the leader of Boko Haram, unaffiliated to the preeminent global jihadi organization, al-Qaeda. Although Boko Haram had failed to find a wholly sympathetic consort in al-Qaeda, Shekau's group remained a powerful, if unaffiliated, force as no alternative existed. Yet this independence was to soon change.

Meanwhile, Boko Haram's violence escalated. According to the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), between 2012 and 2014 Boko Haram was responsible for some 1,153 attacks. Of these, private citizens and property constituted the majority of targets (421), followed by the police (184) and

military (124). Tactically, Boko Haram's attacks were focused on armed assaults (575) and bombings and explosions (299). Of note, the deadliest attack in this period took place in May 2014, in Gamboru, a town on the border with Cameroon. There, roughly 300 people were killed while the soldiers usually stationed there had been relocated north in an effort to rescue the girls kidnapped by Boko Haram a month before, in April 2014, in a mass abduction as known as the Chibok kidnappings.[96]

* * *

A Kidnapping and Mimicry: Acting and Talking like the Islamic State

*

Northeastern Nigeria
April 2014–February 2015

On the evening of April 14, 2014, members affiliated to Boko Haram entered the compound of an all-girls school, the Government Secondary School (GSU),[97] in the town of Chibok in Borno state. Here in Chibok, which was reportedly named after the nearby hills where residents would hide from slave traders in the 19th century,[98] the school had been closed for some weeks due to the deteriorating security situation caused by Boko Haram, but the girls had recently been recalled to take a physics examination.[99]

Boko Haram members, pretending to be security guards,[100] entered the school to scout the compound for building supplies,[101] and soon found a cache that would ultimately prove far more valuable than they could have imagined: hundreds of young girls. On entering the school, they fired shots in the air, threatening to kill students, Muslims first, if they did not obey. As one girl recalled, "We came out of our rooms wondering what to do. The Boko Haram people came to our school and the hostel where we were living and they asked us to stay together. They said they were going to kill us if we didn't do what they wanted. We were very afraid."[102] Boko Haram members soon forced the girls—some 276 in all—into the beds of trucks,

driving them off into the nearby forests.[103] One survivor of the abductions recalled to Human Rights Watch that as she and her classmates were driven away, her abductor asked: "What kind of knowledge are you looking for here? Since you are here to look for Western education, we are here to confront it and teach you the ways of Islam."[104]

As news of the mass kidnapping spread around the world, the abducted students, collectively known as "the Chibok Girls," would eventually become a global symbol of the victims of the brutality of their captors. Quickly, as Nigerian society grappled with the events, the global hashtag #bringbackourgirls circulated on social media, with celebrities such as Michelle Obama, Malala Yousafzai, Antonio Banderas, Angelina Jolie, Puff Daddy, Ricky Martin, and Queen Latifah using it to raise awareness about the plight of the girls. Indeed, the 2014 Chibok kidnappings—and the global social media attention that followed—placed intense focus on the Boko Haram insurgency, which, despite having been churning on with deadly intensity since 2009, had scarcely been noticed outside Nigeria. It also elevated Boko Haram and Shekau to the center of the international global jihadi discourse and the gaze of transnationalist jihadi groups themselves.[105]

While the abduction itself was harrowing, Shekau's taunts about the fate of the girls—whom he threatened to sell as slaves—exacerbated the macabre nature of the event. As Shekau proclaimed in a video released on May 12, 2014:

> Brethren cut out infidels from their necks, brothers you should capture slaves; just because I took girls in western school, they are worried. I said they should even desert the school; they should go and marry. Nonsense, I am the one that captured your girls and I will sell them in the market. I have my own market of selling people; it is the owner that instructed me to sell. Yes, I will sell the girls people, I am selling the girls like Allah said until we soak the ground of Nigeria with infidels' blood and so-called Muslims contradicting Islam.[106]

And yet, despite the global notoriety that the Chibok kidnappings would engender for Boko Haram, reactions to the kidnappings within the global Islamist extremist fraternity were not overly positive. Following Shekau's

claim of responsibility for the Chibok mass abduction in the name of Boko Haram, posts on several of al-Qaeda's official and semi-official social media channels were littered with broad condemnation of the incident. At the core of their critiques was that Boko Haram was holding Muslim girls and women for ransom, a practice forbidden by mainstream Islam.[107] One digital propagandist of al-Qaeda's Saharan branch cited the mass Chibok kidnapping as an act which "taints the image of the mujahideen."[108]

But while al-Qaeda and its affiliates explicitly distanced themselves from the mass kidnapping in Chibok in April 2014, al-Qaeda's newly emergent ideological rival, the Islamic State, praised Boko Haram's actions. In the fourth edition of its *Dabiq* propaganda magazine, released in October 2014, just months after the declaration of its global caliphate, the Islamic State dedicated an entire chapter to providing theological justification for why it was indeed permissible for mujahideen to both kidnap and enslave non-Muslim women and girls.[109] Although the chapter referenced the Chibok kidnapping in Nigeria, the text itself came to serve as a justification for the Islamic State's own kidnapping and enslavement of Muslim women, which would occur, notably, in the Sinjar province of Iraq during the group's armed campaign there in August 2014.[110] During that offensive, IS Central kidnapped an estimated 6,383 members of the ethno-religious Yazidi community—mostly women and children—who were enslaved and transported to IS prisons, military training camps, and the homes of fighters across eastern Syria and western Iraq.[111] Kidnapped Yazidi women were raped, beaten, and sold off by the Islamic State, just as Abubakar Shekau had threatened to do to the Chibok Girls hostages.[112] Subsequent documents later revealed that Shekau had in fact boasted that the Chibok kidnappings inspired the Islamic State's own kidnappings and turn towards enslavement.[113] Indeed, in terms of the democratization of jihad, the kidnappings served as a pivotal moment of sorts: they not only pushed al-Qaeda further away from Boko Haram, but in fact brought Boko Haram in closer ideological alignment with the Islamic State.

Besides the Chibok kidnapping, other commonalities between the two groups soon became evident.[114] Both movements began assimilating territory within their respective theaters, attempting to displace existing governance structures with their own militarized versions of sharia law. While the Islamic State was pursuing its state-building project in Iraq and

Syria in 2014, Boko Haram itself overran large swathes of territory in Nigeria's northeastern Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states, as the Nigerian military failed to stop the onslaught.[115]

Following the Islamic State's declaration of its global caliphate in June 2014, more IS-like behavior would come from Boko Haram by August 2014. In that month, the group overran the town of Gwoza, in Borno state. It soon released a 54-minute video taken at the town's central mosque,[116] in which Shekau, after thanking Allah for the sect's military victories, proceeded to declare the town of Gwoza part of a *dawlah*, or state, which Boko Haram had established in northeastern Nigeria.[117] The announcement appeared to be no coincidence: Shekau's declaration came little over a month after the IS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared the resurrection of a new caliphate under his leadership, not only spanning the Islamic State's territorial conquests of Iraq and Syria, but also proclaiming his leadership of Muslims throughout the world.[118] For its part, Boko Haram's territorial assault continued between October 2014 and February 2015, as it pushed across northeastern Nigeria, eventually capturing nearly thirty towns,[119] including some that were home to tens of thousands of people. After entering many of the towns—just as the Islamic State had done throughout Iraq months earlier—Boko Haram appointed its own emirs and began to institute its own governance agenda enforced by *hudud* punishments.[120]

Even more evidence suggesting a rapprochement between Boko Haram and the Islamic State came in November 2014, when Boko Haram released two propaganda videos that contained symbolism and imagery similar to those in IS videos. The first of these commenced with the inclusion of a specific *rayat al-uqab* (or flag of jihad) which had become a hallmark of Islamic State video productions.[121] The video proceeded with footage of Shekau threatening the government of Nigeria and its foreign allies, as the *nashid*—or Islamic anthem—called "My Ummah Dawn Has Appeared," which had been popularized by the Islamic State's media wing, played in the background.[122]

Further examples of Boko Haram's move towards the Islamic State came in a second video released later in November 2014. In it, Shekau was seen preaching to worshippers in the main mosque in Gwoza—the de facto capital of Boko Haram's recently declared state—where the militant leader

had swapped his usual military fatigues for a *thawb*, or tunic, more traditionally worn by Muslim clerics.[123] The Boko Haram mosque video concluded with an excerpt from one of al-Baghdadi's sermons, which he had delivered from his own seat of power, the Grand Mosque of Mo-sul.[124] Shekau clearly sought to replicate the imagery of al-Baghdadi's speech in Mosul.

Evidence of Boko Haram's increasing attempts to mimic the Islamic State grew yet further in the new year. On January 18, 2015,[125] it launched its media wing, and an associated Twitter account, to disseminate its propaganda. Known as al-Urwah al-Wuthqa (the Indissoluble Link), the outlet may have even been created for Boko Haram by the Islamic State.[126] With its new media outlet, Boko Haram released communiqués through its information arm, which bore the slick production values and iconography commonly associated with the Islamic State, all of which signaled a marked improvement on the grainy and poorly edited media which had previously dominated Boko Haram's public relations campaigns.[127] One video included Boko Haram's beheading of two so-called Nigerian spies, utilizing staging, angles and slow motion in ways that mimicked the executions all too common in IS media releases. Videos began to include subtitles in various regional and international languages, also a feature in many IS media releases.[128] Moreover, with the introduction of the new media wing, Shekau—who had historically dominated Boko Haram's messaging apparatus to the exclusion of other members—was joined in media appearances by other Boko Haram commanders and soldiers, a policy which it has been suggested may be attributable to influence from IS Central.[129]

Apart from aesthetic similarities, there was also an increasing congruence between the content of Boko Haram's propaganda messaging and that of the Islamic State. For example, among the first media released by Boko Haram via its new media outlet were, as Boko Haram called them, photos of "child soldiers," readying themselves for battle.[130] These images were consistent with similar releases by the Islamic State venerating their own child soldiers—their so-called cubs—who were intended to constitute a new "generation of conquering and victory."[131] Around the same time, on February 9, 2015, Boko Haram also released a video of its enforcement of sharia law in the territory under its rule. In it, the group showed scenes of its

punishments for those accused of drinking alcohol, theft, fornication, or adultery, while it praised IS Central's governance agenda by flashing a picture of al-Baghdadi on the screen.[132] Once again, the parallels between Boko Haram's and the Islamic State's brand of governance and subsequent publicization were unquestionable.

One of the most notable communiqués to be released by Urwah al-Wuthqa was a video disseminated on January 27, 2015, entitled "Interview with Official Spokesman Abu Musab al-Barnawi about the Events in the City of Baga."[133] What is significant is that the video was uploaded by an account known to be directly tied to the Islamic State.[134] Moreover, the dissemination of the video occurred via a web of social media accounts, websites, and associated platforms generally recognized as being formally or informally associated with the Islamic State. While the message itself was recorded in Hausa—the common dialect of the parts of northern Nigeria in which Boko Haram operated, and distinct from the Kanuri-language speeches that Shekau usually released—the video was also the first to be released by Boko Haram to include English subtitles, underscoring that its message was aimed at both a local and international audience.[135]

By February 9, 2015, future and formal collaboration between the two organizations appeared imminent. In a communiqué between Boko Haram and Ifriqiya lil-I'lam (Africa Media), the aforementioned jihadi media group based in Tunisia (chapter 5), Boko Haram announced its future ambitions:

> The message of our beloved has reached us, and we are in newfound agreement with the proclamation of the beloved Islamic State. We announce to you gladly that the Consultative Council of the Group [of Boko Haram] is in the stage of mutual consultation and study, and that we will inform you shortly of the [Boko Haram] Group's decision concerning swearing allegiance to the Caliph of Muslims, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.[136]

Its ambitions announced, the world waited.

* * *

PART TWO
THE BAYAH PERIOD

*

An Unholy Alliance: From Boko Haram to the Islamic State West Africa Province

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Nigeria
March 7–12, 2015

The informal amity existing between Boko Haram and the Islamic State would soon become official. In an audio recording released on March 7, 2015, Shekau pledged his allegiance and that of Boko Haram to the Islamic State's caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. In the audio message disseminated via various social media platforms, Shekau stated: "We [Boko Haram] announce our allegiance to the caliph of the Muslims [Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi] and we will hear and obey in times of difficulty and prosperity, in hardship and in ease, and to endure being discriminated against."[137] The pledge of *bayah* continued:

> We call upon Muslims everywhere to pledge allegiance to the caliph [al-Baghdadi] and support him, as obedience to Allah, and as their fulfillment of this era's absent duty [the creation of the caliphate]. We pledged allegiance to the caliph because of the interests of Muslims in their religion and in their worldly affairs which can only be protected by an imam who looks after them according to Allah's laws, and fights the enemy of Islam and those who fight Allah's rule … We as [Boko Haram] pledge allegiance because there is no cure to the Muslim's disunity except the [Islamic State's] caliphate.[138]

Less than a week later, on March 12, IS spokesman Abu Mohammad al-Adnani confirmed the merger. In an audio recording entitled "Kill and Be Killed," disseminated by the Al-Furqan Media Foundation,[139] an official IS media production house, he accepted Shekau's oath of fidelity to the

Islamic State. With a mere five-day lag, the process of affiliate utility validation for Boko Haram would be one of the quickest on the continent: indeed, given the sundry examples of collaboration previously, it was almost a foregone conclusion. With that elevation, "Boko Haram" ceased to exist and the new Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) became to be the fourth IS *wilaya* on the continent, following the concurrent November 2014 announcements of provinces in Libya, Algeria, and Sinai.

In response to the announcement of the formation of ISWAP, the Islamic State's other global provinces broke out in what Abdulbasit Kassim has called an "unprecedented celebration," as the newly announced branch was "paraded as an epicenter in sub-Saharan Africa."[140] To celebrate the occasion, IS provinces from Iraq, Syria, and Yemen disseminated videos lauding the new African affiliate's inclusion in the jihadi group's expanding global network.[141]

In an article published in April 2015, al-Adnani evinced IS Central's pleasure with the inclusion of Boko Haram as the new ISWAP:

> And we bring you the good news today of the *Khilafa's* [caliphate's] expansion to West Africa, for the *Khalifa* [caliph] has accepted the pledge of allegiance made by our brothers in [Boko Haram]. We congratulate the Muslims and our *mujahid* brothers in West Africa on their pledge of allegiance, and we congratulate them on joining the caravan of the caliphate … So whoever is stopped by the disbelieving rulers and prevented from emigrating to Iraq, Sham [Syria], Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula, or Khorasan [Afghanistan/Pakistan], you will not be prevented—by Allah's permission—from emigrating to Africa.[142]

Once the new merger was complete, some foreign commentators viewed Boko Haram's pledge to the Islamic State apocalyptically as a "marriage from hell."[143]

What advantages did Shekau and Boko Haram see in pledging allegiance to al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State in the first place? Likewise, what strategic benefit did the Islamic State imagine would come from declaring Boko Haram its West African province? What rationales, in other words, undergirded its calculus of affiliate utility validation?

First, and most broadly, Boko Haram's vision of Salafi jihadism generally—though not perfectly—aligned with the brand of IS Central. Beyond their mutual desires for the imposition of sharia law, commitment to *takfirist* ideology, and the establishment of a 21st-century caliphate, the two groups also shared ideological and theological forebears.[144] Second, beyond these broader ideological commonalities, each group had its own more practical rationales for the alliance. For Boko Haram, a group that had generally been regarded as a crude grassroots insurgent movement in rural northeastern Nigeria, the desire for connection to broader international forces had always been an undercurrent: the acceptance by the Islamic State offered Shekau and Boko Haram the global jihadi legitimacy that its past years of relations with al-Qaeda had not.[145] Not only would subordination to the Islamic State provide reputational legitimacy, but it also presented Shekau's movement with the opportunity to forge operational and logistical linkages with the Islamic State, then gaining notoriety as the wealthiest terrorist group in the world.[146] The entrance of the Islamic State into an existing theater served, in effect, to "democratize" the jihadi space by offering Boko Haram alternative options for international affiliation beyond simply al-Qaeda.

Third, another primary reason that Boko Haram likely pledged allegiance to the Islamic State was its own weakness and declining fortunes. While still very robust by March 2015, Boko Haram was, at the moment of its pledge, facing renewed counterterror pressure not only from the Nigerian government, but also from a new multinational counterterror force, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which had been formally set up in January 2015, just two months before, by Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Chad, and Benin, to fight Boko Haram.[147]

Fourth, and arguably most important, while Shekau may have had his own reasons for seeking to join, so too dissidents within Boko Haram—who opposed Shekau's leadership—arguably found some benefit in a would-be IS "buy-out." As has been detailed, since Shekau's formal assumption of the leadership in 2010, there had always been detractors within the group. These included Mamman Nur, who, as a potential competitor for leadership, complained to AQIM about Shekau in 2011, and in 2012 formed the breakaway Ansaru movement. Though Nur and his fighters would reintegrate into Boko Haram at some point after Ansaru

ceased to operate in 2013, his reservations with Shekau remained. Thus, for Nur and other internal dissidents, the subordination to IS Central offered a chance to leverage an external pole of power—the ostensibly more powerful voice of IS Central—in an attempt to tame the out-of-control Shekau.[148]

And, while Shekau seemingly had his own rationales for pledging allegiance, some have noted that rather than being gung-ho about joining the Islamic State, Shekau was actually trepidatious, and pressured from members below. Indeed, Jacob Zenn has suggested although Shekau respected al-Baghdadi as the caliph of the Islamic State, he was reluctant to subordinate himself to an outside force, though he did so under pressure from members of Boko Haram who wanted the alliance.[149] Indeed, others have argued that it was only as a result of internal pressure from within Boko Haram—from the likes of dissidents like Nur and Abu Musab al-Barnawi—that Shekau pledged, though he was "reluctant" to do so.[150] As Andrea Brigaglia notes, the democratization of jihad was to be leveraged by members of terror groups as well, with members of Boko Haram viewing "the emergence of a new worldwide jihadi leadership an occasion to moderate the extremism of the Nigerian jihadi autocrat."[151] Shekau's caution might well be at the heart of another conundrum: the delay in Boko Haram's pledging to IS Central, even despite the strengthening of ties since mid-2014.

Clarity on Boko Haram's delay in pledging—despite the group obviously being sympathetic to IS Central for much longer—was provided in August 2018 when a letter was published by a Tunisian national who served within Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia (AST), the Tunisian Islamist group which itself had also moved into the orbit of the Islamic State.[152] In the letter, the Tunisian jihadi noted that he had assisted a member of Shekau's Boko Haram faction in initially enhancing the group's media statements, whose publication often required a Boko Haram member to travel as far as 300 kilometers from an insurgent camp site in Nigeria to an area with mobile connectivity to upload a file of no more than 50 megabytes of rudimentary media. In one of the exchanges with his Nigerian counterpart, the Tunisian jihadi—who himself was sympathetic to the Islamic State—reportedly enquired as to when Boko Haram intended to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State. His Nigerian interlocutor replied: "We are all with the

Islamic State and we all want to give allegiance to the Caliph of the Muslims but the leadership [of Boko Haram] is hesitant [and] because of some doubts and the Majlis al-Shura [shura council] is studying that matter.'[153] In addition to insinuating that Shekau may have been hesitant in offering his fidelity and that of his group, the Tunisian national—who further suggested that he played an intrinsic role in the development of Boko Haram's media arm, al-Urwah al-Wuthqa, which directly linked Boko Haram's and the Islamic State's media wings—stated that al-Qaeda had tried to persuade Shekau to resist pledging his allegiance to al-Baghdadi by sending an envoy to him.[154]

While Shekau and members had their own reasons for pledging, for the Islamic State, there were advantages too. In receiving and accepting *bayah* from Boko Haram, the Islamic State garnered the allegiance of one of the deadliest and largest Islamist extremist organizations in the world. Indeed, the Institute for Economics and Peace ranked Boko Haram as *the* deadliest armed group in the world in 2014, outpacing the Islamic State itself.[155] According to the Global Terrorism Index, Boko Haram violence had claimed the lives of 6,664 people in 2014, around 600 more than those killed by the Islamic State over the same time.[156] In some senses, then, IS Central succeeded in becoming the patron of a terror group even more "successful" than it was.

Besides attracting an insurgency well versed in conducting jihadist violence, the Islamic State managed to gain the fidelity of a global Islamist extremist movement believed to have one of the highest numbers of active combatants in its ranks. Although the figures are difficult to confirm, in February 2015 US intelligence officials believed that Boko Haram comprised around 6,000 battle-hardened fighters.[157] A similar figure was forwarded by security analyst Peter Dorrie, who believed that in February 2015, the month before its pledge, Boko Haram had a combat force of between 7,000 and 10,000 fighters, based on its geographical areas of operation and its battlefield strategies.[158] Other estimates included forced conscripts and armed gangs—the sect had reportedly hired the gangs in its operations in Cameroon, Niger, and Chad—indicating even a conservative strength that exceeded 10,000 fighters.[159]

Perhaps most importantly—beyond capacity for violence and sheer numbers of fighters—the Islamic State found in Boko Haram a movement

capable of matching its territorial ambitions. By March 2015, when Boko Haram had formally pledged its fidelity, it had seized a large swathe of territory that stretched across much of northeastern Nigeria. At the height of its offensive in Nigeria, reports from community leaders suggested that Boko Haram occupied 20 out of the 27 local government areas of Borno state, in addition to pockets of areas in neighboring Adamawa and Yobe.[160] Accounts differed about the exact extent of land that had fallen to the insurgents, with conservative estimates placing the area at 20,000 square kilometers—comparable to Wales or the US state of New Jersey[161]—while more liberal estimates suggested that the sect-controlled territory in northeastern Nigeria was comparable to that of Costa Rica or slightly smaller than the US state of West Virginia, at 54,000 square kilometers.[162] Neither estimate is likely to capture the real picture, given that, unlike IS Central, Boko Haram did not physically occupy territory outside the major towns which had fallen under its control, such as Dikwa, Gamboru, and Gwoza, but, rather, allowed citizens to exercise freedom of movement while leaving those areas to administer themselves.[163] Boko Haram, having seized and governed the largest territory outside what had fallen to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, was living up to the Islamic State's defiant axiom of *baqiya wa tatamaddad* or "remaining and expanding."[164] In rehatting Boko Haram as its new West Africa Province, IS Central had seemingly only buttressed its capacity for the pursuit of its *raison d'être:* the creation of a global Islamic caliphate that would unify the Muslim world under its territorial control and governance.

More acutely still, IS Central likely viewed its new West African Province as a tangible foothold south of the Sahara. Until then, the only other official African *wilayat* it claimed were those in Libya, Algeria, and Sinai. None had, to this point, materialized so far south as that of its new West Africa Province. Finally, and less tangibly, accounts have also suggested that there may have also been a certain *je ne sais quoi* about Shekau himself that resonated with those in IS Central. As Jacob Zenn has written: "North African Islamic State members who had communicated with Boko Haram … before Shekau's March 2015 pledge were drawn to Shekau because of his 'vexing' chants, his defense of enslaving the Chibok Girls, and his imitation of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi [the founder of al-Qaeda

in Iraq] in his videos."[165] That extreme panache, it turned out, would ultimately be Shekau's undoing.

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PART THREE
THE POST-BAYAH PERIOD

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Unhinged:
Shekau as the Leader of ISWAP

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Nigeria
March 2015–August 2016

As with Boko Haram, Shekau's command of the new Islamic State West Africa Province was fraught with challenges and failures from its inception. Soon after Shekau pledged allegiance, IS Central deployed Libyan advisors to Nigeria to improve ISWAP's tactical proficiency and professionalize its combat units.[166] Militarily, despite the resources at its parent group's disposal, Boko Haram's transition to becoming the IS–West Africa Province did little to help the new group maintain its offensive tempo. Its swift accumulation of large swathes of territory following the June 2014 capture of Damboa, a town that manufactures muskets and lies between Chibok and the Sambisa Forest, two Boko Haram strongholds,[167] was rapidly being reversed by early 2015.[168] Driving the shift in the balance of power between the insurgents and the Nigerian state was a memorandum of understanding brokered between the outgoing administration of President Goodluck Jonathan and the neighboring states of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, which had all been affected by the expansion of Boko Haram's insurgent operations beyond Nigeria's borders.[169] Under the terms of the agreement, the militaries of Nigeria's neighbors would launch simultaneous counterinsurgency operations against the sect, which targeted militant positions around the confluence of their respective borders near Lake Chad.

The consequence of these actions left ISWAP having to resist armed offensives from multiple fronts, denying the insurgent movement the safe havens it could have otherwise exploited amid unilateral military operations undertaken by the Nigerian army.[170] Even with the pledge to IS Central, an increased counteroffensive by the Nigerian government and continued pressure by the regional response teams provided by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)[171] put the new ISWAP on the defensive.

While Shekau and his new ISWAP group came under severe military pressure, the nature of the group's interactions with civilian populations likewise deteriorated. By most accounts, ISWAP did not undertake its parent group's profound governance roles. Shekau rarely prioritized the provision of social services in the group's occupied territories either before or after his pledge to al-Baghdadi.[172] One notable study found that, unlike other Salafi-jihadi groups, the new ISWAP (and Boko Haram before it) undertook little governance. Underscoring its negligible attempts at developing in-stitutions, seeking to win over the hearts and minds of populations, or supporting women and girls, the authors argue that the movement "made no concerted effort to project a vision of a future society or concrete benefits of the envisaged caliphate that would generate a level of public support."[173]

Instead, attacks on civilians—Muslim and non-Muslim alike—intensified under ISWAP. The group turned to systematically attacking populations, both to punish them for infractions and to loot supplies (which had been running short amid the multilateral counterinsurgency operations), also ordering violence against civilians fleeing its crumbling *dawlah*. In one of the many macabre incidents to have occurred amid MNJTF offensives, as government-aligned soldiers approached an insurgent camp in the heart of Boko Haram's Sambisa Forest stronghold in March 2015, ISWAP militants reportedly stoned several civilian residents of the camp who refused to flee with them and instead awaited liberation by government forces. One woman, 27-year-old Lami Musa, had just given birth as the raid began. "As they started stoning us, I held my baby to my stomach and doubled over to protect her." While Musa and her baby survived, many other women did not.[174] So violent and globally infamous had Shekau become that, for all the wrong reasons, he earned himself a place in *Time* magazine's 100 Most Influential People in the World list in April 2015.[175]

With this loss of territory, supplies, and manpower between early 2015 through mid-2016, renewed consternation emerged within ISWAP's ranks. The same issues that had motivated the dissidents when Shekau was at the head of Boko Haram resurfaced. In articulating more broadly the nature of dissent against Shekau as the leader of ISWAP, Omar Mahmood and Christian Ani suggest that the three primary sources of contention revolved around Shekau's dictatorial leadership style (involving silent killings of dissidents and lack of welfare for group members); his perceived inability to reverse battlefield losses (especially his inability to provide weapons and fuel for soldiers); and, most importantly, his aggressively strict interpretation of *takfir* (according to which any person, including a Muslim, was a target for killing unless he or she actively and explicitly supported ISWAP's mission).[176] Shekau's leadership, which was based on fiat and not legitimacy, has led observer Michael Nwankpa to note: "instead of establishing a broad-based leadership [he] has concentrated on a personality cult strongly reminiscent of that of Joseph Kony from the Lord's Resistance Army."[177]

Among the leading dissidents was Mamman Nur, a potential leader of Boko Haram after Yusuf's death,[178] who had previously complained to AQIM of Shekau's poor leadership.[179] As mentioned, these unhappy members within Boko Haram arguably strategically positioned themselves to use the new affiliation with IS Central to express their dislike of Shekau. To that end, they sent eight letters to al-Baghdadi and his cohorts in 2016 to complain of his behavior.[180] Mamman Nur—the founder of the breakaway Ansaru group, whose members reintegrated back into Boko Haram/ISWAP at some point after 2013—was himself suspected of being the primary link between ISWAP and IS Central.[181] So intense had internal divisions become that, according to Fullan Nasrullah, ISWAP's internal affairs were referred to the IS Libya province for arbitration.

While ISWAP's members were frustrated with the path that Shekau had been taking, IS Central's leadership was also less than pleased. Among other issues, IS Central was unhappy with Shekau's use of child suicide bombers,[182] which, despite directives from IS Central leadership imploring Shekau to desist,[183] he continued.[184] More broadly, IS Central's and ISWAP's own internal detractors were angered by Shekau's choice of targets, attacks which would reflect upon the Islamic State itself: for

internal dissidents, Shekau's penchant for killing unarmed Muslim civilians —particularly by the deployment of suicide bombers[185]—was a non-starter. Facing internal dissent from within the group and external dis-sent from IS Central, Shekau was increasingly viewed as a pariah even within his own orbit of allies.

* * *

The Magazine Coup

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Globally
August 2016

Proving accurate the adage that the "pen is mightier than the sword," Shekau was dislodged from his position of leadership in ISWAP not through brute force, but rather through an article published in a magazine. In August 2016, the Islamic State released an issue of its weekly propaganda magazine, *Al-Naba*.[186] One article contained an interview with a man that IS Central described as the *wali*, or governor, of its West African Province. He was not Shekau, but instead Abu Musab al-Barnawi. It was perhaps the most passive-aggressive leadership pink slip to be issued in the history of 21st-century terrorism.

But just who was this new IS Central-appointed *wali* who had replaced Shekau? Abu Musab al-Barnawi had been a central figure in Boko Haram—and then ISWAP—for years. Hailing from the birthplace and epicenter of Boko Haram's insurgency, Borno state ("al-Barnawi" denotes that the individual was native to Nigeria's Borno state), he had previously been identified as ISWAP's incumbent military operations chief, one of Shekau's closest advisors and, perhaps most notably, the first surviving son of Boko Haram's founder, Mohammed Yusuf.[187] Al-Barnawi had also appeared in the first video launched by Boko Haram's media wing, Urwah al-Wuthqa, in January 2015, during which he took great pains to refute claims that Boko Haram had killed Muslim civilians in its attacks on Baga, as had widely been claimed. Importantly, al-Barnawi had, along with Mamman Nur, been one of the long-time internal critics of Shekau,[188] and both of

them had criticized Shekau before AQIM in 2012 and, later, IS Central in 2016.

And what of Shekau? Upon the initial release of the *Al-Naba* issue revealing the news that al-Barnawi was now ISWAP's *wali*, rumors began to circulate. Had Shekau—who was rumored to have been killed numerous times before[189]—finally met his demise at the hands of Nigerian counterterror forces?[190] Had dissent from within ISWAP finally led to an internal coup? Or, was IS Central's leadership tired of his intransigence and simply eager to rid itself of its troublesome subordinate? As it turned out, Shekau had not in fact been killed, but rather his ouster was an internal move by dissidents, which was seemingly supported, but not orchestrated, by IS Central.

Unsurprisingly, Shekau did not accept this demotion quietly. Just hours after the release of the magazine, Shekau released his rejoinder via audio message on August 4, 2016.[191] He had not, he insisted, been killed. Nor did he even acquiesce in his being replaced, saying that he was still the leader of the IS West Africa Province.[192] Instead, he declared that al-Barnawi and his followers were infidels—an accusation which the militant leader often cited as justification for acts of violence against Nigeria's Muslim communities—and that he had been both deceived and betrayed.[193]

Al-Barnawi's response to Shekau was equally prompt. On August 6, he released his own audio recording in which he provided justification for why Shekau had been demoted from his position of leadership by ISWAP.[194] In the communiqué, al-Barnawi accused Shekau of living in opulence while the majority of Boko Haram combatants faced starvation.[195] Al-Barnawi also noted Shekau's manipulation of Quranic verses to legitimize his acts of wanton violence, many of which were directed against ISWAP members whom he distrusted or members of the communities over which the group had presided. Most notably, al-Barnawi accused Shekau of apostasy, making the claim and that he was no longer worthy of being followed. In ending his tirade against Shekau, al-Barnawi declared:

> This was the beginning of our revolt against you. If you leave us alone, we will leave you alone. If you continue antagonizing us, we will also continue. If you repent, we will accept you and embrace

you. You should repent and fear Allah. This is the open letter to you [Shekau].[196]

Al-Barnawi provided more detailed justification for his severance of ties with Shekau, and why he was now recognized as the true leader of ISWAP, in a book co-authored with his brother entitled "Cutting Off the Tumor of Shekau's Kharijites,[197] in Pledging Allegiance to the Honorable Ones," which first appeared in 2018.[198] In the publication, they describe Shekau as an "innovator," "hypocrite," and "*khawarij*" and accuse the former Boko Haram and ISWAP leader and his followers of several transgressions, including his misguided interpretation of *takfir*. Particularly, al-Barnawi took umbrage at Shekau's interpretation of "chain *takfir*,"[199] or the "excommunication of the excuser,"[200] an even more extreme interpretation whereby an individual who questions the excommunication of another is him or herself considered a disbeliever.[201]

In addition to rejecting Shekau's invocation of "chain *takfir*," al-Barnawi bemoaned Shekau's insubordination and disrespect towards the authority of the caliph, al-Baghdadi.[202] This charge of insubordination was premised on Shekau's mass kidnapping and enslavement of Muslim women and children—an operational strategy which was habitually deployed by the Boko Haram leader even after the domestic and international outcry which followed the Chibok mass abduction. According to al-Baghdadi's ruling, mass enslavement was only permissible in instances where the victims were non-Muslims, while Shekau argued that it was permissible to enslave Muslim women whom he had declared apostates.[203] al-Barnawi argued that Shekau's continued indiscriminate mass enslavement of Muslim civilians across Nigeria's northeast was thus directly transgressing the law of the caliph to whom his pledge of fidelity prescribed total subservience. Some authors have suggested that Shekau's inability to maintain a stable, functioning state following its transition into ISWAP that could attract followers may have lost him the favor of IS Central.[204]

Thus, after eighteen months—from March 2015 to August 2016—IS Central announced in the pages of a periodical that Shekau was no longer the leader of the group that he had brought to global infamy. ISWAP, so IS Central confirmed, had a new leader.

* * *

A Jihadi House Divided:
Impacts of the ISWAP and JAS Split

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Nigeria
August 2016–March 2018

Thus, by August 2016, Shekau was out, al-Barnawi was in, and the Salafi-jihadi landscape in northeastern Nigeria was split in two. Among other patterns, the new ISWAP under al-Barnawi would soon show its intention of moving away from Shekau's indiscriminate targeting and, instead, attempt to rebrand itself by primarily attacking Nigerian military installations, raiding them for weapons, and largely leaving civilians alone.[205] By 2018, for instance, ISWAP attacked and raided as many as fourteen military bases in Nigeria's Borno state, seizing significant quantities of weaponry and equipment.[206] Moreover, al-Barnawi's ISWAP made it clear that it sought to distance itself from Shekau's expansive interpretation of *takfir*, which allowed him to justify the killing of even Muslims if they failed to actively join him.[207]

Following his ouster, Shekau resurrected a new offshoot group, which revived the name JAS—the original and official name of what was colloquially called Boko Haram, a name which had ceased to be used entirely when the group became ISWAP in March 2015[208]—and retreated to his original stronghold in the Sambisa Forest.[209] There, following his August 2016 demotion, Shekau continued his attacks in September.[210] Importantly, the same ethos that had led to his ouster from ISWAP continued to characterize his new iteration of JAS, which remained far more prone to targeting civilians in accordance with Shekau's interpretation of *takfir*. One of Shekau's most infamous tactics was his employment of child suicide bombers, which he continued to use after his demotion by the Islamic State. A 2017 analysis of the demographic profiles of hundreds of suicide bombings by JAS and ISWAP showed that children and teenagers formed as much as 66.7 percent of all suicide bombers whose ages could be

ascertained or estimated.[211] Shekau's resort to such tactics likely reflected JAS's relative weakness and small size: in 2017, US military advisors suggested that al-Barnawi's faction had some 3,000 to 4,000 fighters, while Shekau's had approximately 1,500.[212]

Initially, some sporadic violence between the new ISWAP and the new JAS broke out. According to the International Crisis Group, soon after the split, in 2016, Shekau sent his men to attack the deserters who had decided to realign with al-Barnawi.[213] In one such battle in July 2016, "dozens" of Barnawi-aligned fighters were killed.[214] In total, at least six separate armed clashes between ISWAP members and JAS combatants occurred between the time of the split in the organization and May 2017.[215] Less than a year later, the *Wall Street Journal* cited Nigerian military sources in claiming that as many as 400 ISWAP and Boko Haram combatants had been killed in armed clashes between the warring factions.[216] Ultimately, however, ISWAP fended off these attacks from the deposed Shekau, and eventually even absorbed some of Shekau's disaffected fighters.[217]

Despite these initial clashes, the breakaway of the JAS faction from ISWAP resulted in a tense but generally peaceful stalemate by 2017: as one observer has noted, in spite of occasional violence the two groups worked to quickly "deconflict" would-be tensions.[218] Each faction ultimately settled into a modus operandi of undertaking military action in its own distinct geographic area, with JAS generally located in the Sambisa Forest and ISWAP more operationally active in the Lake Chad area. Some have suggested that IS Central—whose demotion of Shekau was never recognized by Shekau himself—may have worked to broker a ceasefire;[219] to maintain appearances of fidelity, Shekau went as far as relabeling some of his faction's media output with IS logos in early 2017.[220] As Omar Mahmood and Christian Ani see it, when the factions split, there was potential for cooperation, competition, or cohabitation. Ultimately, the factions settled on an at times uneasy cohabitation. And while violence between them would eventually subside, both factions issued repeated statements challenging the other's legitimacy, with Shekau appearing to continue to court IS Central despite his loss of recognized leadership.[221] To the extent that a detente existed between groups, there are at least three

instances—one in 2018[222] and two in 2019[223]—in which ISWAP and JAS are presumed to have worked in tandem with one another.

For its part, in the aftermath of the split, the al-Barnawi-led ISWAP needed to rebuild and rebrand. As ISWAP looked towards a future without Shekau and his followers, its goals were many, including recruiting soldiers, adding weaponry, securing territory and food for its fighters, and, importantly, generating new sources of funding. To achieve the last, IS Central began sending ISWAP quarterly payments of $500,000, with a one-time cash infusion in January 2017 of an estimated $1,500,000.[224] To accomplish its other goals, IS Central orchestrated the dispatch of ISWAP members to its Libyan province for training, and, conversely, had Libyan trainers visit ISWAP, eventually setting up camps to train specialized personnel, including snipers, medics, media personnel, and engineers.[225] In addition to financial transfers and training, the broader post-split rebuilding of ISWAP was undertaken with significant direction from IS Central, which offered and monitored a "blueprint" for the al-Barnawi faction's revivification.[226] Not only was material regeneration necessary, but so too was a reconception of how the group deployed violence. Gone were the days of Shekau's indiscriminate targeting of civilians. Instead, ISWAP remained focused on violence directed toward the state. Based on figures from the Global Terrorism Database, of the 27 attacks that can be definitively attributed to the ISWAP faction[227] between August 2016 and February 2018, 18 targeted the military, with only 6 targeting private citizens and property.

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The Dapchi Kidnappings and Fall of Mamman Nur

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Dapchi, Nigeria
February–March 2018

Ranging in age from 11 to 19 years, the students at the Government Girls Science Technical College (GGSTC) in the Nigerian town of Dapchi, Yobe

state, were preparing to have a meal in the refectory of their school, when, in the early evening of February 19, 2018, a cacophony of gunfire and screaming erupted. When they drew nearer to the gates of the school's compound, the girls saw several vehicles at the entrance manned by men dressed in what appeared to be uniforms belonging to the Nigerian army. The men began coaxing the girls aboard their rumbling vehicles, parked outside the school. Yet something about the fatigue-clad passengers on the flatbed trucks was not right. Perhaps it was their unkempt, scraggly beards, atypical—and, in fact, forbidden—for Nigerian soldiers. Perhaps it was the soldiers' leather sandals, worn instead of combat boots. Maybe it was their visible, brightly colored turbans—worn instead of helmets—or their fluency in the Kanuri dialect local to Borno and parts of surrounding states.[228]

Before the girls could discern their identities, the men's requests for the girls to board their waiting trucks turned quickly into barked demands. The fighters' hands, which had moments before gestured invitingly, now pointed weapons towards the children. The soldiers brusquely ushered the young girls into the vehicles. Tangles of young bodies became knotted together, the girls' screams were drowned out by the sounds of engines and barked orders from their captors.

As chaos unfolded, students and staff sought to flee. A *New York Times* reporter later noted that some children attempted to scale the gates of the school to escape. Men in the trucks pulled them down,[229] forcing them into the waiting trucks. As one girl, Fatima, told reporters: "They were saying if you run we will shoot you," she said. "They were shooting into the air."[230] Nevertheless, many girls succeeded in fleeing into the nearby brush, a group of thirty later revealing that they spent the night at a farm, hiding from the militants.[231] As quickly as they had come, the overcrowded trucks started making their way along the dusty roads out of Dapchi, with nearly one hundred schoolgirls on them. The girls were now captives of members of the Islamic State's West Africa Province, which, earlier that day, had entered the town of Dapchi on trucks, according to witnesses, shooting guns and detonating explosives in a bid to cause people to scatter into the bush.[232]

In all, 110 girls were abducted in the Dapchi kidnappings, as they would come to be known; they bore a harrowing resemblance to the Chibok kidnappings of four years earlier. Anger and worry again permeated

Nigeria, though a glimmer of hope surfaced when, on 21 February 2018, a Yobe state official announced that security forces had rescued some of the hostages.[233] Yet the next day, the claim was later proven to be untrue, and was ultimately retracted. "No girl was rescued," authorities admitted. Five parents are said to have fainted from shock at the news briefing.[234]

Parents' dismay turned into outrage soon after, when the Nigerian military revealed that it had repositioned a battalion stationed near Dapchi to a new location just prior to the kidnapping.[235] The directive—predicated on the supposed militant activity in the area—likely provided fighters of ISWAP with the opportunity to execute their most notable operation since the announcement of their formation in March 2015. Anger bubbled throughout Nigeria and globally. The Muhammadu Buhari administration described the Dapchi kidnappings as a "national disas-ter,"[236] and civil rights groups staged protests throughout the country. The UN secretary general, António Guterres, likewise condemned the attacks.

Perhaps most surprising of all, just over a month after the kidnappings, at three in the morning of March 21, 104 of the 110 schoolgirls were returned to the town of Dapchi[237] aboard the same flatbed trucks used to transport them away.[238] Members of ISWAP warned the girls' parents that their children should not ever return to school.[239]

Of the six girls who were not returned to Dapchi, five had been killed during the initial raid. A sixth, the lone Christian girl, named Leah Sharibu, had refused to convert and remained in captivity, which—as best as can be ascertained—is where she remained at the moment of al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019. Thus, other than the six, why would ISWAP kidnap these girls, hold them for more than a month, and then return them to their families?

Varying, and oftentimes competing, explanations came to the fore. While some asserted that the Nigerian government paid a large ransom to secure the girls' release—a charge the Nigerian government denied—others have suggested that when al-Barnawi discovered that his intransigent subordinates had violated al-Baghdadi's prohibition on enslaving Muslims, he ordered that the Dapchi girls be returned.[240] Still others have proposed that certain senior figures in the group made a unilateral decision to release the girls, in a bid to broadcast to local civilian society that it sought to avoid the indiscriminate brutality and extremism of its predecessor.

Around five months after the majority of the Dapchi hostages were released, reports broke that it had led to a deadly mutiny within the ranks of ISWAP. The decision made by senior ISWAP leadership figure Mamman Nur to release the hostages without a ransom demand[241] met with intense criticism from a faction within ISWAP itself. This faction rejected Nur's "softer" approach and wanted a ransom payment to be made, as with the Chibok girls. Nur, they argued, had made them look weak,[242] and his willingness to negotiate with the Nigerian government was rejected by hardliners, reportedly including IS Central itself.[243] On August 21, 2018, in reaction to his attempts to create an ISWAP less at odds with the civil society in which it operated, Mamman Nur was executed by his own cohorts.[244] It was, as Jacob Zenn has described, a "fratricide,"[245] and a move that Fulan Nasrullah has argued came at the direction of IS Central, which sought to replace older veterans of Boko Haram/ISWAP with new, younger leaders who had trained in IS camps in Libya.[246]

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The Rise of Ba Idrissa and ISWAP's Bid to Win Hearts and Minds

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Lake Chad Basin
2019

On March 4, 2019—nearly a year after the Dapchi girls were freed—ISWAP released an audio recording in which it stated that it had appointed yet another new governor, or *wali*. The relatively unknown figure was introduced as Abu Abdullah ibn Umar al-Barnawi, or Ba Idrissa.[247] In the same communiqué, it was confirmed that Abu Musab al-Barnawi had been given a position on ISWAP's highest decision-making body, or shura council. Though the exact causes of the leadership shuffle remain murky, one of the more convincing hypotheses is the possibility that IS Central's decision to approve al-Barnawi as the leader had rendered ISWAP too docile for its members' liking. In short, if al-Barnawi had been appointed the *wali* because Shekau was too brutal, Ba Idrissa succeeded him because

al-Barnawi was not brutal enough. Whatever the reason for the ascension of Ba Idrissa—and the concomitant demotion of al-Barnawi—it appears that the leadership shuffle may have not been authorized by IS Central. By late 2019, IS Central had yet to formally acknowledge Ba Idrissa's authority over its West African affiliate.

What was clear was that throughout 2019 ISWAP showed itself to be attempting to navigate multiple currents of tension. Amidst a sea of related but distinct actors, the new ISWAP under Ba Idrissa sought to define its own identity between the brutality of Shekau's wanton, indiscriminate violence, the perceived weakness of al-Barnawi and Nur, and the untrustworthy Nigerian military. While not reluctant to mete out punishments, ISWAP showed itself throughout 2019 to be more eager to win the hearts and minds of those in its areas of operations than its predecessors had been.

By 2019, ISWAP seemed to show—more than any IS affiliate in Africa since Libya in 2014–16—many of the trappings of an IS Central-like aspirant pseudo-state, rather than a mere jihadi insurgency, undertaking both provisionary and punitive governance.[248] While Shekau had only ever implemented rudimentary forms of governance in areas under his control prior to the 2016 split, ISWAP's modus operandi in the Lake Chad Basin seemed to place renewed emphasis on ingratiating itself with civilian populations, all the while remaining strict enough to impose fear. In mid-2019, the International Crisis Group and the Institute for Security Studies both released reports detailing how ISWAP had begun to tax citizens, and, in return, was providing them with many of the social services of a state in the villages it occupied in the Lake Chad Basin.[249] Leveraging the expertise of medical experts in its ranks—some of whom were voluntary members, while others were believed to have been kidnapped—ISWAP administered medical treatment to those living in its areas of control, sometimes for no charge. When its medical personnel could not effectively treat patients, ISWAP worked to transport patients to better medical facilities. To supply its medical staff with the requisite equipment, ISWAP conducted targeted raids on health clinics. ISWAP also facilitated the construction of latrines,[250] dug boreholes for water,[251] and allowed polio vaccines to be distributed by non-profit organizations in its areas of operation.[252] For children in the Lake Chad Basin, ISWAP went so far as to institute an

approved school curriculum, an alternative to the secular education system of the Nigerian government.[253]

In exchange for these services, ISWAP levied taxes which, according to the reports, locals paid, mostly willingly. By early 2019, fish dealers based on the islands of the Lake Chad Basin could expect to pay approximately $3 per carton of fish leaving the area, while fishermen working on Lake Chad could expect to pay around $14 for a one-time fishing permit.[254] So appropriate were the new rules deemed to be that some women living near Lake Chad took to calling their relatives who had fled to Maiduguri, to urge them to come back and begin working in the area.[255] Meanwhile, ISWAP purportedly sent others to internally displaced persons (IDP) camps to recruit their residents to return, also for the purpose of being taxed in exchange for social services.[256] One herder praised ISWAP's tax collectors as highly meticulous and exacting in their calculations and thus unlikely to exploit the taxed,[257] while others in the area praised ISWAP for avoiding double taxation, a common practice in Nigeria.[258] To encourage economic development, ISWAP also took to offering micro-loans to budding entrepreneurs,[259] and, to ensure access to basic food staples, set price caps on agricultural goods.[260] By securing trade routes it also sought to further encourage development in the agricultural and fishing sectors, mainstays of the local economy.[261]

Yet there are two sides to the equation: while ISWAP governed and sought to be more discriminate in its targets of violence, it nevertheless retained many of the harsh *hudud* punishments for those who disobeyed its orders. Adultery was punishable by death and theft was punishable by the loss of a hand.[262] Like certain other IS provinces in Africa attempting to undertake governance, ISWAP monitored and punished lifestyle infractions: smoking and drinking were prohibited, as was the improper use of cell phones, which had been equated with internal espionage. Prayers were to be undertaken when and how ISWAP proscribed, and infractions were punishable by beatings by ISWAP members.[263]

Perhaps the most notable example of ISWAP's more principled—though still often draconian—violence was its March 2018 kidnapping of two Nigerian women serving as aid workers, Saifura Ahmed and Hauwa Liman. Both women had been working with the International Red Cross

Committee, Ahmed as a midwife and Liman as a nurse. In September 2018, Ahmed was executed by ISWAP, followed by Liman's execution in October. A video shows Liman forced to kneel down in a white *hijab* and then being shot at close range.[264] As an ISWAP statement declared: "Saifura and Hauwa were killed because they are considered as *murtads* (apostates) by the group because they were once Muslims that have abandoned their Islam the moment they chose to work with the Red Cross."[265]

Yet what gave legitimacy to the new ISWAP rule among populations is that the group not only punished citizens who disobeyed: it also closely monitored its own soldiers' behavior, punishing those who treated civilians under its control unjustly. One ISWAP commander reportedly had one of his fighters accused of killing a civilian executed. Other members of ISWAP who were kidnapping civilians for ransom payments were excommunicated by the group.[266] ISWAP worked to assure citizens living near Lake Chad that it primarily sought to target military and government forces: gone were the days when innocent civilians would be targeted by Boko Haram suicide bombers in places like markets and bus stops.[267] Bus drivers captured in ISWAP ambushes have told how upon their abduction, ISWAP soldiers fed them and simply allowed them to return on their routes, unharmed.[268] By demonstrating to citizens that the rule of law under its jurisdiction applied universally, ISWAP in 2019 sought to gain the pseudolegitimacy reminiscent of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. As Fulan Nasrullah summed up in 2019, "ISWAP has deliberately adopted a strategy of avoiding unnecessary violence and exploitation against civilian populations," though, "when necessary, ISWAP will visit harsh punishments on erring individual civilians."[269]

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ISWAP and IS Central Connections:
Interpreting the Linkages

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Lake Chad Basin
2014–2019

With the recognition of its Islamic State's West Africa Province, what was the nature and depth of the actual linkages between the two groups? In short, while there is clear evidence of connections between ISWAP and IS Central, these links are far from indicative of an IS province being directed from above. Instead, though it is arguably less of a "sovereign subordinate" than other IS *wilayat* in Africa, it remains the case that ISWAP's trajectory was far more self-directed than determined by its parent group's wishes.

Without doubt, the most profound links between IS Central and ISWAP existed in the media sphere. As discussed previously, IS West Africa Province has shown close coordination with IS Central in media production and dissemination, as its products—as for all *wilayat* of the Islamic State—have been released centrally through the IS media apparatus, and IS Central has imposed uniform graphics and templates.[270] Indeed, this dynamic existed even prior to Shekau's 2016 demotion and the split within the group; for its part, JAS under Shekau has retained replicated versions of IS insignia on its own in-house media products.[271] Moreover, some have argued that IS Central had discretion over the content of ISWAP's media output rather than merely serving as a publisher: though Shekau had dominated Boko Haram's media presence from his takeover in 2010 until the emergence of the ISWAP media wing in January 2015, as soon as the group became ISWAP in March 2015 Shekau ceased to appear in the ISWAP media campaigns. Nor would he appear in them for the next seventeen months. This was so, Jacob Zenn has argued, because IS Central, which had reservations about Shekau, did not want to publicize and amplify his presence in the group.[272]

While IS Central's role has been most evident in media, there are other instances of alliance between the groups, the likes of which are not often seen so vividly in most other IS African provinces. To be sure, there have been instances of communication. These include intercepted communications between ISWAP fighters and IS Central in March 2018.[273] Anonymous sources from the International Crisis Group suggest that IS Central has worked to push for reconciliation between the post-August 2016 ISWAP and JAS, though without clear evidence.[274] Also of note, IS Central used its West Africa Province as a base to attract other affiliates: ISWAP sent a message in October 2015 exhorting members of al-Shabaab in Somalia to break away from that group.[275] However, it is also the case

that, compared with other IS provinces globally, there is less evidence of communication between ISWAP and IS Central than with other African provinces, such as Libya or Sinai.[276]

In addition, there has been some evidence, scant though it is, to suggest the transfer of training, tactics, or procedures from IS Central to ISWAP. Most broadly, Fulan Nasrullah has argued that IS Central has worked to help ISWAP develop into a more elite force, both tactically and operationally.[277] It has also been suggested that ISWAP's use of up-armored suicide vehicle-borne IEDs starting in 2017—they are used in West Africa only by ISWAP, and are emblematic of IS Central—was indicative of knowledge transfer between IS Central and ISWAP.[278] An anonymous Nigerian analyst claimed that in 2018 all military barracks raids conducted by ISWAP were coordinated by IS Central members abroad, though this statement should be taken with some skepticism.[279] For its part, the International Crisis Group suggested broadly in May 2019 that ISWAP has "obtained some support already [from IS Central], notably in the form of training," though it did not offer specifics of this claim.[280] And in September 2019 the Soufan Group conjectured that ISWAP was receiving technical assistance from IS Central in the use of drones for surveillance, thus making ISWAP's drones even more sophisticated than those of the Nigerian military. It claimed that use of these drones was evidence of "its close relationship with the Islamic State," though with limited evidence.[281] Strategically, it had been argued that consultations between ISWAP and IS Central led by late 2019 to the agreement that ISWAP was ill advised to hold towns, as this would elicit international counterterrorism reactions.[282]

There have also been similarly sporadic mentions of money and personnel transfers from IS Central to ISWAP. On the financial side, these include the presumed transfer of money to ISWAP from the Arabian Peninsula in 2017,[283] and one vague instance of a financial transfer via Western Union in 2016 from IS Central to militants assumed to have joined ISWAP.[284] Fulan Nasrullah has argued that IS Central financing was "crucial to the survival of ISWAP" in 2016 and helped it to expand in 2017. But, he says, by 2018 IS Central's support had "dropped sharply," constituting only an estimated 3.41 percent of ISWAP's budget that year.[285] In broad alignment with this, the International Crisis Group suggested that

as of May 2019 financial flows between IS Central and ISWAP had "resumed though they remain limited."[286] On the personnel side, some observers claimed having seen a detachment of ISWAP fighters departing from Baga in February 2019 to train or fight with IS fighters in Libya.[287] Despite these sporadic links, ISWAP's trajectory, while certainly more informed by IS Central's ideas and assistance than most other African affiliates were, has, on the whole, been more the product of local dynamics.

* * *

The Islamic State West Africa Province at the Time of al-Baghdadi's Death

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Lake Chad Basin
October 2019

By the time of al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019, the Islamic State's West Africa Province was a group in transition, eager to strike the right balance between being a legitimate alternative to the Nigerian state while also not being seen as too lenient or too harsh in its interpretation and application of sharia. Following al-Baghdadi's death, ISWAP re-pledged allegiance to the new leader, al-Qurayshi, on November 7, 2019.[288]

For most of its existence, the Islamic State's West Africa Province was one of its biggest, deadliest, most competent, and, indeed, most internally tumultuous satellites on the African continent. The global emergence of the Islamic State, as elsewhere on the continent, served to democratize jihad in northeastern Nigeria, where Boko Haram, under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, had arisen as a deadly, powerful, though indiscriminate group. While it had contemplated al-Qaeda affiliation, neither Boko Haram nor AQIM found the fit a good one. This was a disappointment to Shekau, in some respects, given his desire to transform Boko Haram from a localized insurgency into a globally recognized jihadi group. With the June 2014 rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, a group whose own brutality and ambitious agenda broadly paralleled his own, Shekau—and, more importantly, his frustrated subordinates—seemingly found a global jihadi parent group to which to attach itself for greater exposure. In the case of

Boko Haram, the process of affiliate utility validation was a quick, simple one. Having shown through media releases their affinity with the Islamic State's project while simultaneously possessing great operational capability, Boko Haram—itself the deadliest terror group in the world in 2014—was an intuitive choice for IS Central, which acknowledged Shekau's pledge only five days after it was made on March 7, 2015.

And yet, upon its emergence as the Islamic State West Africa Province, IS Central began to recognize that the same reasons that made al-Qaeda wary of incorporating Shekau's group into its orbit remained relevant for it too. Shekau's wanton brutality, megalomaniacal leadership qualities, and intransigence in the face of IS Central served to alienate him from his own followers locally and the Islamic State globally. In most instances, ISWAP remained a stereotypical "sovereign subordinate" of IS Central. While the latter played a foundational role in the establishment of ISWAP's media arm, and other examples of transfers of money, arms, and training did occur, taken holistically the Islamic State's West Africa Province remained a group whose trajectory was far more a result of embeddedness within the local political and ethnic landscape than a consequence of IS Central's direction.

Yet, what would be notable was that, in fact, Ba Idrissa's ISWAP was not the only ISWAP group to reaffirm allegiance to the Islamic State following al-Baghdadi's death. Two days after ISWAP reaffirmed its allegiance, a newer, second branch of the Islamic State's West Africa Province—based in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso—did the same. That branch, which had recently been subsumed, by decision of IS Central, under the broader administrative umbrella of ISWAP, had historically been better known as the Islamic State in Greater Sahara.

7

THE ISLAMIC STATE'S WEST AFRICA PROVINCE—GREATER SAHARA

PART ONE
THE PRE-BAYAH PERIOD

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The Making of a Jihadi Leader: The Rearing of Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahraoui

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Western Sahara, Algeria, and Mali
1970s–2011

The vibrancy of the purple, yellow, and pink bougainvillea cascading over compound walls faded that evening as the shadows from the setting sun began wrapping the low-slung, ochre-colored house rows of Laayoune, the capital of Western Sahara, which is situated between the Atlantic Ocean in the west and the expansive Saharan desert to the east. The streets on which the boys were playing soccer were also shared with goats grazing on leftover scraps, while chickens pecked from here to there. On that warm

summer day in 1985, one boy squinted from the sun above, drying the sweat from his right temple. Suddenly, with the flick of his foot, the soccer ball jumped into his lap. Ricocheting the ball against the wall of an adjacent building, Lahbib jerked to his friend's left side, quickly retrieving the ball and kicking it with the outside of his ankle between the two rocks which formed the makeshift goal in the center of the dusty street. Lahbib smirked, satisfied with his show of prowess. The other boys in his team cheered. Lahbib maintained the title as the neighborhood's best *gouchi*, or left foot.

"Lahbib!" An authoritative voice shouted, coming from a house some two dozen meters down the street. The boy, still reveling in his goal, understood that it was time to go home. Lahbib had been out all day. Now, dinner was ready. He could scarcely wait to eat the couscous and meat and vegetable stew that his mother, Malouma, had prepared.

Lahbib, who decades later would become the leader of the Islamic State in Greater Sahara with the *nom de guerre* Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahraoui, was like any other boy living in Western Sahara in the 1980s. Born in February 1973[1] to a family of locally storied heritage,[2] Lahbib was one of four brothers. He was, according to his childhood friend Moulay Ahmed Allayli, well behaved, positive, and athletic.[3]

For all his childhood normalcy, Lahbib, like his compatriots living in Laayoune in the 1980s, had one unique experience that would forever mark his outlook: a youth spent in the Morocco-occupied Western Sahara, a geopolitically liminal territory permeated by an ethnocultural impulse for liberation. When Spain's military dictator, General Francisco Franco, died in 1975, it withdrew from its territories in Africa, including the territory formerly known as Spanish Sahara. Quickly, Morocco moved in to occupy the recently relinquished lands, which various Moroccan monarchs had believed to be part of the Alawite kingdom of Morocco.[4] Today, that territory is known as Western Sahara.[5] Thus, with Spain's departure, Morocco viewed its reoccupation of the Spanish Sahara territory as a natural next step, the reconstitution of a bygone kingdom whose presence had only been temporarily interrupted by a brief Spanish interlude. For their part, ethnic Sahraouis like Lahbib's family believed that the land belonged to them.

By the time Lahbib was entering early adulthood in the early 1990s, the Moroccans already exerted control over much of Western Sahara, in

particular the main population centers, and, thus, ethnic Sahraouis like Lahbib grew up during the decades referred to as "the Years of Lead," or *sanawat al-rasas*, in Western Sahara,[6] characterized by often-brutal crackdowns on independence-seeking Sahraouis by Moroccan security forces. Throughout his youth, Lahbib was acutely aware of (and imbued within the politics of) the Polisario Front,[7] the Sahraouis' armed group fighting physically and politically for Sahraoui independence. Having emerged in 1973—the year of Lahbib's birth—and rooted in Sahraoui nationalism, the Polisario Front aimed to end Moroccan presence in the Western Sahara and achieve Sahraoui independence. In 1976, its members announced the existence of the Sahraoui Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), to serve as the de facto government of the Sahraoui-claimed lands —referred to as the "Free Zone"—which cover ap-proximately 20 percent of the eastern parts of the disputed Western Sahara. (This contrasts with the approximately 80 percent of the Moroccan "Occupied Zone.") The de facto capital of the SADR government was in the southwestern Algerian province of Tindouf: here, set up in the mid-1970s, a series of Algerian refugee camps served as a refuge for Sahraouis fleeing conflict. The Polisario Front would act as the armed wing of the SADR.

The repression, marginalization, and policies of impoverishment imposed on the Sahraoui by the Moroccan authorities during "the Years of Lead" pushed Lahbib—like so many other Sahraoui youth—to join the ranks of the Polisario Front. Between 1989 and 1991, several skirmishes took place between the Polisario Front and the Moroccan army, ending with a ceasefire brokered by the United Nations, which entered into effect on September 6, 1991. In that month, the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) peacekeeping force entered the territory, keeping the peace between the two parties, before the UN Security Council promised to hold a referendum for Western Saharan self-determination in 1992.[8] However, even with the presence of MINURSO forces, Moroccan authorities continued to crack down on Western Sahara residents; Sahraoui youth thus began to view MINURSO forces as collaborators with the Moroccan government.[9]

* * *

One day in 1992, at the age of about 19,[10] Lahbib took a stand that would alter the course of the rest of his life. Leaving Western Sahara and evading arrest by Moroccan authorities, he fled to the extreme south of Algeria, to Sahraoui camps in the Tindouf province. In Algeria, he pursued his undergraduate studies at the University of Mentouri in the northern Algerian city of Constantine, eventually receiving a degree in social science. While the Polisario Front provided him with military training, he joined the movement's youth organization, the Sahraoui Youth Union (UJSARIO), in which he was in charge of receiving and accompanying foreign delegations during their visits to the Tindouf refugee camps.[11] Lahbib's childhood friend, Moulay Ahmed, would recall that Lahbib married and had children, whom he raised in the Rabouni camp but later abandoned.[12]

The early 2000s found Lahbib frustrated by the absence of a political settlement between Polisario and Morocco and by the decline in the conditions of the Tindouf camps as the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) suffered budget shortfalls and cut funding to Western Saharan refugees.[13] By 2004, Lahbib suffered health problems and began to find refuge in religion, becoming close to Sahraoui religious students at the Ibn Abbas Institute in Nouakchott, Mauritania. Eventually, he decided to demobilize from the Polisario Front and join the refugee camp's Islamist movement.[14]

Subsequently, Lahbib left Algeria to become involved in cross-border trade.[15] His destination was nearby northern Mali, whose ethnic Tuareg inhabitants refer to as Azawad. Living the life of a smuggler between northern Mali and southern Algeria, Lahbib became acquainted with both Arab traders and Islamist militants associated with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Lahbib found meaning and purpose in this jihadi ideology, and in the summer of 2010 he officially joined AQIM's Katibat Tarik ibn Ziyad.[16]

After joining AQIM, Lahbib adopted the *nom de guerre* Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahraoui (the name by which he will be referred to from now on),[17] and soon gained prominence within the group. By February 2011, he had achieved low-level notoriety within the AQIM group for masterminding the kidnapping of an Italian woman named Maria Sandra Mariani, along with her guide and cook, in the desert south of the Algerian town of Djanet, on the second day of that month.[18]

* * *

AQIM: A Southern Turn and Shifting Allegiances

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Algeria, Mali, and Niger
1994–2013

Although AQIM—of which Lahbib was a member—had historically been based primarily in Algeria (officially becoming a named al-Qaeda affiliate branch in 2007), its eventual move southward into Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso would help set the stage for the emergence of ISWAP–Greater Sahara. While the primary "southern turn" of AQIM—which members themselves would term the "Sahara conquest"—is generally thought to have been in motion in 2012,[19] evidence has shown that the presence of AQIM and its affiliates in the Sahara and Sahel south of Algeria had occurred long before. According to the accounts of members of AQIM's predecessor groups—the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC)—jihadis began undertaking activities in the Sahara and Sahel in coordination with al-Qaeda's Osama bin Laden and his operatives much earlier, as far back as 1994,[20] focusing on Mauritania as a key node of operations, for instance, by 2005.[21] As Alex Thurston describes it: "The GSPC's repositioning involved a twin strategy of relocation and accommodation; relocation into the Sahara, and accommodation of the business, tribal/ethnic, and political interests."[22] Indeed, the GSPC's "southern turn" marked the beginning of a long-term effort to regionalize the Algerian jihad. The GSPC veteran and *wali* (governor) in the Tombouctou region, Talha Ould Hassan al-Barbouchi, described in a 2014 Al Jazeera interview how in 2006 he went on a recruiting mission: "I went to a lot of neighboring countries like Niger, Algeria, Burkina Faso, and other regions. I even went to Nigeria. We were looking for a way to mobilize the whole region."[23]

Thus, despite earlier forays southward, by 2008 the militant landscape in Algeria had definitely proven a challenging one within which to operate. Rising international oil prices bolstered Algerian state revenues and thus its

counterterror efforts, while, domestically, declining public support for AQIM itself, which began to fracture and weaken due to amnesty measures, led the militant group's leaders to look southward toward the Sahara and Sahel for refuge.[24] Here they implanted themselves within local social and economic structures that would become part of a broader, decades-long networking and alliance-building process. Financially, their presence was at least partly underwritten by participation in an emerging kidnapping industry. Soon, northern Mali turned into a new focal point for the migrating AQIM.[25] There, AQIM gained breathing room and refuge from Algerian counterterror operations. In addition, it became increasingly involved in smuggling and trafficking,[26] and formed alliances with ethnic Arabs and Tuaregs, especially through marriage and the recruitment of marginalized and disaffected local youth.[27]

With AQIM's geographic shifts came shifts in al-Sahraoui's fidelity. Leaving AQIM proper, he co-founded a splinter group of AQIM, called the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA),[28] more commonly known by its French acronym MUJAO.[29] Founded in October 2011,[30] it was based in northern Mali and southern Algeria. In contrast to AQIM, which was primarily composed of Algerian Arabs from North Africa, MUJAO's core leadership consisted of Sahelian Arabs from Western Sahara, Mauritania, and Mali. However, its rank and file consisted in large part of black Africans recruited among dark-skinned ethnic groups such as Songhai, Fulani, and Tuareg Bella (or Black Tamashek), who opposed the growing influence of Tuareg rebels and jihadist groups based in northern Mali.[31] Though its ethnic composition was different from that of AQIM, MUJAO's goal of spreading sharia law across a broader cross-section of West Africa remained in line with that of AQIM. By July 2012, al-Sahraoui had become MUJAO's spokesman; later, he rose to prominence as a military commander, also heading the group's Shura Council.[32] In that capacity, he would also become a key facilitator of MUJAO's kidnapping efforts, serving as both planner and negotiator.[33] In 2012, it was announced that MUJAO had received $18.4 million for the release of the three hostages, in addition to having two of its own prisoners released.[34] When he first appeared on Al Jazeera, speaking on behalf of MUJAO, his family and friends in Laayoune, where he had grown up, were shocked.[35] Never had

they thought that the well-behaved Lahbib would end up as a central figure in an increasingly well-known jihadi movement.

While the Algerian crackdowns served as a "push" factor in AQIM's move southward, the Malian collapse of 2012 was an important "pull" factor, setting the stage for an even more definitive assertion of the AQIM presence in Mali. In January 2012, northern Mali-based ethnic Tuaregs operating under the banner of the Movement for the National Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) launched an uprising in their long-running efforts to achieve independence for the Azawad region of the country. Malian authorities bungled the response to the rebellion, in turn angering junior and non-commissioned officers in the Malian army who, in March 2012, launched their own uprising. On March 21, 2012, Malian soldiers carried out a coup, blockading access to the presidential palace. The next day, the military junta's spokesman went on television to announce that Malian president Amadou Toumani Touré had been displaced for his incompetence, and that the military would soon install a democratically elected government to replace him.[36]

With the southern Malian capital of Bamako in chaos, the wheels were set in motion for the takeover of Azawad back in the north. Seeing an aperture of opportunity, MNLA separatists began cooperating with a combination of AQIM and AQIM offshoot groups to take over large swathes of Mali.[37] The alliance would see the separatist and generally secular-minded MNLA Tuaregs cooperate with jihadists, including AQIM's Sahara branch, the Islamist-inclined AQIM offshoot MUJAO (of which al-Sahraoui was a member), and Ansar Dine (a local Tuareg jihadi group). While the relationships between the groups were complex and fraught—the jihadi groups essentially hijacked the MNLA's rebellion[38]—they collectively succeeded in taking over, at their height, approximately two-thirds of Mali.[39]

However, this MNLA–MUJAO–Ansar Dine–AQIM cooperation did not last: it turned out to be a broken square. MUJAO, which actually opposed the MNLA, drew broad support from locals opposing the dominance of Tuareg rebels who sought to establish an ethno-nationalist state across a territory where they were a minority. Indicative of these tensions, al-Sahraoui and MUJAO held the Malian city of Gao for nearly seven months,[40] beginning in late June 2012, after ousting the MNLA.[41] In

January 2013, once members of these groups attacked central Mali, France launched its Serval intervention operation.[42] Within a matter of weeks,[43] the operation had dislodged both jihadis (from MUJAO, Ansar Dine, and AQIM proper) and non-jihadis (from the more secular and independence-seeking MNLA) from the major northern towns of Mali, dispersing their fighters throughout the subregion.

Having been kicked out of northern Mali's major towns with MUJAO, and fleeing from the French Operation Serval forces in northern Mali, AQIM affiliates, including al-Sahraoui, began to move south yet again, this time toward central and southern Mali. Ultimately, they would relocate to a border area in neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger, known as the "tri-state border" region (or the Liptako-Gourma).[44] Al-Sahraoui found refuge with a group of what would become loyal, mainly Fulani and Arab fighters in the borderlands between Mali's northeastern Menaka region and Niger's southwestern Tillabéri region, in particular, the Ansongo-Menaka Wildlife Reserve, a former giraffe reserve in Mali, directly across the border from Niger. Newly based in the border village of Inarabane, Mali,[45] al-Sahraoui became an informal protector of primarily Fulani communities living on the Nigerien side of this border, offering them security and weapons to protect them from their ancestral rivals, the Dawsahak and Tuareg on the Malian side.

With this group of Fulani loyalists behind him, al-Sahraoui shifted jihadi group allegiances yet again, partnering with another of the Sahel's famed jihadis, the notorious one-eyed jihadi named Mokhtar Belmokhtar, a long-time GSPC/AQIM member. In August 2013, along with Belmokhtar, al-Sahraoui created a new jihadi group, called al-Mourabitoun (The Sentinels).[46] From there, al-Sahraoui became a senior leader within al-Mourabitoun, which quickly began to make its presence known in the already-crowded jihadi landscape in which al-Sahraoui was a rising player.

* * *

Limits to Ambition and Looking Towards the Islamic State

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Sahara Desert
2013–2015

Between its foundation in August 2013 and April 2015, al-Mourabitoun developed a name for itself by carrying out a series of suicide bombings in Niger and Mali, and abducting a Romanian security guard in Burkina Faso. Yet, for his part—and despite his ambitions—al-Sahraoui came to recognize that there were limits to his rise in leadership. Although he was already a senior leader within the AQIM-aligned al-Mourabitoun by early 2015, Sahraoui was left unsatisfied, especially with the balance of power within the group and the trajectory of Sahelian militant networks more broadly. The 2013 fusion of al-Sahraoui's MUJAO and Belmokhtar's al-Muwaqqi'un bil-Dima (Signatories in Blood) came under the instructions of al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, in what likely was the beginning of a process of reintegrating AQIM dissidents into AQIM's fold, a process over which al-Sahraoui did not have full control. The fusion also took place at a time when a global rift was under way among jihadist groups. Al-Sahraoui's previous leader, Ahmed Tilemsi, was killed in December 2014, and Belmokhtar soon became more focused on Libya, and thus reigned from afar, putting into question his commitment to the alliance.

Several indices point to a more protracted presence of Belmokhtar in Libya. He was the intended target of a June 2015 US airstrike on a farm south of the Libyan town of Ajdabiya.[47] Two months later, in August, IS supporters declared Belmokhtar "wanted dead" for allegedly taking part in the battle of Derna on the side of AQIM-linked militants against the Islamic State.[48] These circumstances when taken into consideration suggest that both personal and ideological disagreements between Belmokhtar and al-Sahraoui informed the latter's decision to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State. At heart, al-Sahraoui was unhappy to find himself in a familiar but unenviable position: being a subordinate with limited prospects of rising to the upper echelon of AQIM's Sahelian leadership. As one observer from the United Nations noted: "Al-Sahraoui … just wanted to be in charge of something, but it was clear that it was not going to be for al-Qaeda."[49] Thus, as he had done for years, Sahraoui took matters into his own hands, attempting to switch allegiances yet again. For all of these reasons—frustrations with global leadership direction, disagreements with intra-group

strategic decisions, and his own personal ambition—he began to see the Islamic State's global rise as an opening for advancement.

Al-Sahraoui was not alone in the Sahara in looking toward the Islamic State. One of the first instances underlining how the Islamic State served to democratize jihad in the Sahara was the declaration of support for IS Central from the Sahara in a letter entitled "Azawadi Support for the Islamic State." Written by Hamad Ould al-Khayri, one of MUJAO's founding members, who was responsible for its judicial affairs, the letter was published in July 2014, two weeks after al-Baghdadi delivered his speech in Mosul in which he declared the caliphate of the Islamic State. Some reports suggest that al-Khayri did not appreciate the configuration represented by the merger between MUJAO and al-Muwaqqi'un bil-Dima to form al-Mourabitoun, which may explain why he expressed at such an early stage his support for the Islamic State.[50] For his part, while al-Sahraoui did not take immediate steps to publicly express his support for the Islamic State, it seems clear that the Islamic State was an enticing prospect.

* * *

PART TWO
THE BAYAH PERIOD

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Pledges of Allegiance from the Sahara

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Sahara Desert
May 2015 to October 2016

On May 13, 2015, al-Sahraoui issued a pledge of *bayah* to the Islamic State via audio message,[51] which was obtained by the Mauritanian news outlet Al-Akhbar. In the 35-second audio clip, al-Sahraoui pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi, whom he referred to as "the emir of believers and the caliph of Muslims." In the audio clip, Sahraoui further called on "all Muslims to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State and to defend against the enemies of

Islam," and exhorted "all other Muslims to gather around the Islamic State in defense of the Caliphate."[52] It is believed that Sahraoui's pledge was communicated through an obscure figure, Abu Malik Shaybah al-Hamad, interchangeably described as a Tunisian or Algerian defector from Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia (AST) or AQIM who had turned IS member and operative of the pro-IS media group Ifriqiyah lil-I'lam (Africa Media).[53]

Al-Hamad played an important role in the Islamic State's regional outreach and was instrumental in Boko Haram's pledge of allegiance to it. In hindsight, it is also worth noting that al-Hamad pointed to language barriers in his communications relating to Boko Haram's pledge, describing himself as a fluent Arabic and English speaker.[54] If he was Tunisian, one assumes that he could more easily have communicated in French (the second language of most Tunisians) with any French speaker in Boko Haram's ranks.

By mid-2015, Africa Media ceased its activities as did al-Hamad. However, al-Hamad's name showed up on a list in November 2017, predominantly comprising Saudi pro-Al-Qaeda *muhajireen* (or immigrants) in Syria, under the "group of Faris Najd camp," named after the jihadist IS critic "Faris Najd."[55] The mention of al-Hamad on the Syria list accords with an account that suggests he was a Saudi national who was arrested and detained at the Central Prison in Kuwait City. Given that al-Hamad was a main link between ISGS and IS Central, the arrest of the Saudi mediator could probably explain why communications apparently broke down between the two. Nevertheless, following al-Khayri's pledge, described above, al-Sahraoui's would be the next declaration of support for the Islamic State emanating from the Sahara, which led to his group being known—colloquially though not formally—as the Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS).

Within less than forty-eight hours, on May 15, 2015, the al-Mourabitoun co-founder Mokhtar Belmokhtar countered the new claim that his group had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. The pledge, he said, had not been approved by the Shura Council of his group.[56] Instead, he claimed, al-Sahraoui's pledge was not a pledge from al-Mourabitoun but an individual oath of allegiance made by al-Sahraoui on behalf of himself. To counter al-Sahraoui's allegedly unilateral claim, Belmokhtar further affirmed his allegiance to al-Qaeda and its leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri.[57] In

the subsequent fallout, the Algerian newspaper *El Watan* reported (from a single and thus questionable source) that Belmokhtar loyalists clashed with al-Sahraoui and his men on June 14 near Gao, leaving al-Sahraoui severely wounded.[58] As elsewhere on the continent, IS Central met Sahraoui's pledge of *bayah* with silence.

In retrospect, the lack of enthusiasm for al-Sahraoui's pledge was entirely understandable. At the date of the initial pledge, al-Sahraoui's would-be group offered little in the way of proving affiliate utility validation. It was a new group: indeed, the very act of pledging itself had created the group, which, as an entity, was a breakaway from another series of merger and splinter groups. For the Islamic State, deciding whether to accept al-Sahraoui's group was the ultimate gamble: beyond a proclaimed allegiance to IS, little could be known about its fighters, sources of funding, capacity for violence or governance, or any other dimension of the group's potential to provide some degree of formalized utility to IS Central. That IS Central did not accept the upstart group—with whom it had had no sustained communication previously—was wholly unsurprising.

This reluctance on the part of IS Central to grant al-Sahraoui's group provincial status was well founded: on the operational front, months after its initial pledge, ISGS was nowhere to be seen. Between May 2015 and September 2016, ISGS did not conduct a single attack. Nor did it show any attempt to create a media arm or to govern, even though the Nigerien government had begun to put ISGS on its radar.[59] At the core of ISGS's initial silence, it seemed, was not a lack of will, but a lack of capacity. As one Nigerien intelligence officer noted, al-Sahraoui in early 2016: "Didn't have many men. I knew him in early 2016, and he only had four pickups then." This was problematic since, as the journalist Ruth Maclean remarks, "in the rural regions of Niger, power is often correlated with the number of [trucks] under one's control."[60]

While violence would not become a feature of its early profile, ISGS did begin to issue threats. In particular, al-Sahraoui focused his efforts, at least verbally, on his native Western Sahara. In an audio statement received by Al Jazeera in May 2016, al-Sahraoui called for attacks against posts of the MINURSO mission in Western Sahara—which he and many other Sahraoui youth in the Polisario Front had reviled as children—as well as Western tourists in Morocco. In the same audio, he further called on people

in the "Islamic Maghreb" to support the Islamic State.[61] Despite al-Sahraoui's threats, it was highly questionable if the group—which had yet to claim an actual attack *anywhere*—possessed the capabilities to conduct attacks in either Western Sahara or Morocco, especially given its location a desert away in northern Mali.

While such initial calls to violence seemed to ring empty, ISGS's threats proved to be more than just hollow several months later. Rather than carrying out attacks in Morocco or Western Sahara as it had called for months before, the group instead set its sights on Burkina Faso, which was the location of its first act of violence. In September 2016, members of al-Sahraoui's ISGS targeted a customs post in Markoye, Burkina Faso, near the Nigerien border, killing a customs agent and wounding three civilians. Two days later, ISGS claimed responsibility for the attack through the Mauritanian news outlet Al-Akhbar.[62] The following month, in October 2016, ISGS once again struck Burkina Faso. Attacking a military outpost in Intangom, in the northernmost Oudalan province, it killed four soldiers and a civilian,[63] in what has been described as the group's first major assault.

Yet the attack that would put the ISGS on the map, especially in the eyes of IS Central, was the Koutoukalé Prison break. The Koutoukalé Prison, a high-security facility some twenty-five miles north of Niger's capital, Niamey, held an estimated 550 inmates—double its intended capacity, given the slow-moving Nigerien court system[64]—including former and current AQIM, Boko Haram/ISWAP, and MUJAO militants.[65] Freeing them became ISGS's objective. At 4:30 a.m. on October 17, 2016, two ISGS gunmen attempted to storm the gate of the prison in a bid to release the jailed jihadis, in a manner akin to the spectacular prison break undertaken by Boko Haram in 2010 in Bauchi (chapter 6).[66] Guards killed one of the ISGS assailants, but the others got away. However, as Niger's interior minister told reporters: "The attackers were wearing explosive belts, proving the terrorist nature of the operation."[67] While no inmates were freed, the attack at least showed the group's ambitions in attempting to mimic the "Breaking the Walls" campaign undertaken by the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) between 2012 and 2013.[68]

After more than a year of relative silence since its original May 2015 pledge, this string of attacks in September and October 2016 gave ISGS long-awaited recognition from the Islamic State. On October 30, 2016, IS

Central officially accepted ISGS's pledge of *bayah* by issuing a statement on its newswire Amaq, stating: "Katibat al-Murabitin, under the command of Abu al-Walid al-Sahraoui in northern Mali, pledges allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and joins the Islamic State."[69] The statement was followed by a video showing Sahraoui reading out the oath of fidelity surrounded by nearly forty of his men equipped with AK-47 rifles, PK machine guns, RPG-7 launchers, and a Strela-2/Grail surface-to-air missile. After al-Sahraoui's reading, the group gathered in a circle, piling up hands to collectively give the oath, and ending the ceremony with a *takbeer* chant. IS Central and al-Baghdadi had finally accepted the oath, some seventeen months after its initial pledge.

Despite this acknowledgment, however, IS Central did not confer upon al-Sahraoui the title of IS province, or *wilaya*. As with former KUBN members in Tunisia (chapter 5), IS Central simply began to refer to al-Sahraoui and his fighters as Jund al-Khilafa, or "Soldiers of the Caliphate." For all his ambition, it had taken al-Sahraoui more than a year to clear the lowest rung in the Islamic State's hierarchy: that of mere acknowledgement of existence.

* * *

Held Captive:
An Insider's View of the Islamic State in Greater Sahara

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Niger
November 2016–February 2017

After its eventual recognition by IS Central, one of the best sources of information on the internal dynamics of ISGS was a former captive. On November 8, 2016, Abdul Wahid, then a 28-year-old Nigerien soldier, was kidnapped by ISGS. Originally from the city of Maradi, the second largest in Niger, Wahid, an ethnic Hausa, joined the Nigerien National Guard in 2014.[70] Between the hours of five and six on the morning of November 8, just one month after IS Central had officially acknowledged ISGS's pledge,

Wahid was abducted while positioned at a forward operating base in Banibangou, Niger, not far from the Niger–Mali border.

"We weren't even yet awake when the jihadis surprised us by firing on us, in every direction. They were riding thirty motorbikes and had nine heavily armed vehicles, equipped with M80s. Our two watchmen were killed,"[71] Wahid recalled in a conversation in 2019.

That morning, ISGS took Wahid and another colleague, Habib Issa, hostage. After being blindfolded, the two Nigerien soldiers were thrown in the back of a truck and driven away. Some 160 kilometers from Banibangou, ISGS militants slit Habib Issa's throat.[72] From then on, Wahid was their sole hostage. Driving for the entire day, they arrived that night at five at the kidnappers' base. There, Wahid would be tied to the trunk of a tree, where he spent three months as a captive. As the only captive of ISGS to have been released alive, his ordeal offers one of the most in-depth accounts available of the inner workings of the group.

Although initial estimates suggested that only a few dozen fighters had defected with al-Sahraoui from al-Mourabitoun in May 2015, Wahid made waves in a 2018 interview with *Guardian* reporter Ruth Maclean when he claimed that ISGS had around 600 combatants in his estimate. However, he mentioned, ISGS members told him that they had double that number.[73]

During the course of his captivity, Wahid identified his captors and, subsequently, listed them by name. The chief of the post was Aboubacar (Petit) Chafori,[74] a former MUJAO member who had left with al-Sahraoui to form ISGS; he was himself a known jihadi in the Mali–Niger borderlands.[75] Other members at the camp included the operation's chief throat-slitter,[76] while another was in charge of child recruitment.[77] ISGS members were primarily Malians and Nigeriens, speaking Fulfulde[78] and sometimes Arabic.[79]

These languages heard by Wahid are what one would expect given the ethnic composition of ISGS, which had, since its inception, been marked by an alliance between North African Arabs (like al-Sahraoui), black Africans (predominantly ethnic Fulani),[80] and certain Tuareg and Dawsahak factions. By and large, despite al-Sahraoui's own North African background, his ability to recruit and gain the confidence of "black" Fulani who inhabit the border regions of Mali and Niger had allowed him to capitalize on—and,

indeed, exacerbate—pre-existing ethnic tensions in the Mali–Niger borderlands for the pursuit of his own personal ambitions.

The ethnic rivalry between Fulani and Tuareg-Dawsahak is largely limited to the Mali-Niger borderlands, but serves as a microcosm of the ethnic dimensions of jihadi instability in the Sahel as a whole. Indeed, antipathy between Fulani and Tuareg-Dawashak pastoralist communities dates back many years. After repeated bouts of drought in the region for decades, a bilateral accord signed between Niger and Mali in the 1990s granted the Fulani, a pastoralist cattle-herding people in western Niger, access to the more fertile grazing lands of the eastern Mali region of Menaka, held by the Dawsahak and Tuareg of Mali. However, the terms of the high-level bilateral talks did not trickle down to the Dawsahak and Tuareg on the ground in Mali. Thus, when Fulani herders unexpectedly brought their animals onto Tuareg territory, fighting ensued.[81] In response to the encroachment on their lands, the Dawsahak and Tuareg occasionally conducted raids to steal Fulani cattle. The collapse of the Qaddafi regime in Libya in 2011 worsened tensions between the Fulani and Dawsahak–Tuareg. Soon, Malian Tuaregs, who had been part of the fighting in Libya, poured back into northern Mali,[82] bringing with them caches of weapons—which they would use against the encroaching Nigerien Fulani.[83] For protection, the Fulani created ethnic self-defense militias beginning in the late 1990s.[84] Later, in a continuing bid to protect themselves, they joined with the most powerful force in the region,[85] the AQIM-affiliated MUJAO, "not out of a desire to wage jihad, but to protect themselves against their old enemy."[86] Over time, jihadi groups like MUJAO and, later, ISGS would capitalize on these ethnic tensions to recruit Fulani fighters, stoking anti-Dawsahak and anti-Tuareg sentiment to increase group cohesion among their primarily Fulani fighters.[87]

Under al-Sahraoui, ISGS became adept at leveraging Fulani ethnicity[88] to its advantage to maintain its area of operations in the border zone of western Niger, central Mali, and northern Burkina Faso. Indeed, so shrewd had al-Sahraoui, himself Arab, become at integrating himself with Fulani that some locals described him as a "savior" to researchers from Human Rights Watch. As well as making himself popular with the youth by giving them soccer balls,[89] he wove himself into the local social fabric by purportedly marrying a Fulani woman from the village of Bouratam in

2016. It is said that al-Sahraoui earned the nickname Higo, which means "friend" in Fulfulde.[90]

Just as the Fulani had increasingly came to find some protection with jihadi groups like MUJAO and, later, ISGS, so too the Dawsahak–Tuareg populations began to create their own self-defense groups. By the time of al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019, the two primary self-defense groups were the Tuareg Imghad and Allies Self-Defense Group (GATIA) and the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA). Moussa Ag Acharatoumane, who served as the leader of the MSA, the Dawsahak ethnic militia that operates in Mali and border areas in neighboring Niger to fight the ISGS, agreed to be interviewed in April 2019.

Why did his group, the MSA, form? In short, "we wanted to preserve the interests and customs of our community," he said, which included protecting the community from jihadi groups. More specifically, he noted: "ISGS has always had problems with our community. Al-Sahraoui had sent a letter [to us] two years ago, explicitly stating what he did not like about us. Now his group attacks us because now they're cornered and being chased from their points of refuge in our region."[91]

The threats from al-Sahraoui to target MSA came about because the informal, sub-statist militias like MSA and GATIA collaborated with France's counterterror force, Operation Barkhane, and the Malian state, providing intelligence and sometimes conducting joint raids against ISGS and other al-Qaeda-affiliated groups. Indeed, in mid-2017, al-Sahraoui threatened to strike at these militias if they did not cease collaboration,[92] and in July 2017 ISGS attacked a convoy of local militias, including the MSA and GATIA, killing nine. In return for the support from MSA and GATIA, Barkhane and the Nigerien military provided these Tuareg militias with training, logistics, intelligence, and air support.[93]

The formal incorporation of these sub-statist militias to fight jihadi armed groups has borne decidedly mixed results. On one hand, these counterterrorism efforts appear to have been increasingly effective. Since GATIA's and MSA's emergence, respectively in 2014 and 2016, their efforts have resulted in the killing and arrest of a significant number of ISGS militants, and the seizure of arms, ammunition, vehicles, motorbikes, and other military equipment. Moreover, the use of these local militias has

provided international forces with important assets in terms of intelligence gathering and tracking.[94]

Despite these successes, lurking below the surface are accusations that MSA's and GATIA's engagements in "counterterrorism" were simply a guise to legitimate Dawsahak and Tuareg retaliatory killings against rival Fulani. Some have argued that their presence has exacerbated already existing tensions between local communities, resulting in extreme human rights abuses of rival groups under the pretense of "counterterrorism."[95] Fears proliferated that members of MSA and GATIA would continue to settle scores, and loot from and even kill members of the Fulani community on both sides of the border, unless efforts are made to replace ad hoc local militia allies with members of its formal counter-militancy operations. To such critiques, MSA leader Moussa Ag Acharatoumane replied: "We're not looking to fight anyone … Our objective is simply to securitize our populations against all threats."[96]

During the course of his captivity, Wahid also claims to have seen Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the one-eyed chief of al-Mourabitoun, with whom al-Sahraoui had broken when he pledged unilateral allegiance to the Islamic State in May 2015. "During my captivity, I saw him twice. He asked his men if they were going to kill me or liberate me," Wahid recalled.[97] This sighting of Belmokhtar—himself an al-Qaeda stalwart—at a camp run by the Islamic State is significant. As will become clearer soon, this relationship between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State—ostensibly rivals in jihadi geopolitics—of collaboration in the Saharan and Sahelian terrains marks out the area of operations as unique.

"There were no women among the terrorists," Wahid recalled. "Those [men] who were married from time to time would ask for permission to go visit their families."[98] While there were no women were in the ISGS camps, Wahid was vocal about ISGS's inclusion of children. "Every day, I saw children of between eight and ten years who came into the camp for training. They'd receive sheep and cows as payment and would learn to read the Quran."[99] In another interview, Wahid estimated that three to five new boys would arrive at the camp daily.[100] "One time, I asked one of these children where he'd come from. He told me that he was from Mangaize [north of Ouallam] and that his big brother had brought him to the camp."[101]

Financially, ISGS appears to have funded its activities through multiple revenue streams. ISGS took a portion of the fees it charged on the various trafficking and trade routes that run through the areas of its operations. It also collected taxes (*zakat*) from the local population.[102] Moreover, it generated revenue from trading livestock, illegal mining, and the smuggling of spare automobile parts, partially through Arab merchants, who are vital parts of its logistics network.[103] Finally, by the time of al-Baghdadi's death, ISGS was believed to hold two foreign hostages, an American aid worker, Jeffrey Woodke,[104] and a German humanitarian, Jörg Lange,[105] two long-serving expatriate development workers for whose releases it likely sought a ransom. However, since they were both still in captivity by the time of al-Baghdadi's death, the group seems not to have obtained any ransom money.[106]

As for governance, ISGS has shown little of the wide-scale attempts at ruling attributed to other IS groups on the continent and beyond. While there have been rare instances of the presence of IS-run courts,[107] forced taxation,[108] forced evictions of people from their villages,[109] and intimidation of local leaders presumed to be cooperating with local or international forces,[110] ISGS has never come close to possessing the aspiration (much less the capability) for wide-ranging governance as seen in the case of the Islamic State in Libya (chapter 2). One example of its attempt to exert its authority and stamp out Western influence came on April 12, 2018, when it kidnapped a school-teacher, Issouf Souabo, from a school in Bourou, Burkina Faso, twenty miles from the Mali border. According to the ISGS spokesman, his infraction was speaking French to his pupils. "All those who teach [their pupils] in French [must be] fought," read the statement.[111] Nevertheless, ISGS remained much more of an insurgency—focused on violence—than an aspirant government or administration.

How did Wahid pass the time while in captivity? "I did nothing except to reflect on what my escape would like," he said.[112] For their part, his captors occasionally sought to solicit information from him about the nature of the Nigerien military. In addition, they taught him how to read the Quran, and tried to "brainwash me," as he put it, with their idea that the Nigerien army itself was *haram*, or forbidden.[113] And yet, when it came to religiosity,

Wahid noted that piety was seemingly not high on ISGS members' priority list: in a separate interview, he told reporters that ISGS members did half of the number of normal daily prayers required by the Quran, and often skipped ablutions.[114]

Ironically, his captors would also be some of Wahid's greatest sources of joy. The child soldier recruiter, Boureima Hama, from Tiloa, inspired him to hope for freedom. "He made me promise that one day I would escape," Wahid said. In speaking of another captor, Sidi Amadou, Wahid recalled that he was "moved by the kindness of Sidi, who would visit me every day and cheer me on. He gave me hope for life."[115] Indeed, Hama and Amadou had good reason to be optimistic. By February 8, 2017, after three months in captivity, ISGS took Wahid to the open brush and, as he describes it, "just left me there."[116] Soon, the Nigerien military came and picked him up. "The day of my liberation, I really did not believe it," he recalled.[117]

* * *

Ramping Up

*

Mali and Niger
February–October 2017

Following their release of Wahid, and in a bid to carve out a secure operational space, ISGS began targeting members of the Nigerien and Malian defense and security forces, as they were the main impediments to its securing a base of operations. On February 22, 2017, ISGS militants ambushed a convoy of the Nigerien military near the village of Tirzawane, in the Tillabéri region, near the Malian border, killing sixteen soldiers and injuring eighteen more.[118] On March 7, ISGS members raided a Nigerien gendarmerie position (again in the Tillabéri region of Niger,) killing seven and seizing arms and ammunition. Two months later, on May 31, it raided another gendarmerie position in Abala (again in the Tillabéri region), killing seven.[119]

As ISGS began to ramp up its attacks, it also began to publicize its violence. Though, unlike other IS affiliates in Africa, ISGS never created its own media arm, it began to disseminate claims of its attacks to various news outlets—Agence France-Presse and Nouakchott Information Agency (ANI) among them—in addition to circulating WhatsApp messages of disputable credibility. It also released videos for local consumption,[120] though until 2019 none were ever redistributed by IS Central's news agency, Amaq.[121]

Over the course of summer 2017, ISGS's ranks grew. While its core had been primarily composed of former MUJAO members (Fulanis loyal to al-Sahraoui along with some Arabs, Dawsahaks, and Tuaregs), soon members of other regional jihadi groups elected to renounce their former affiliations, and have their smaller *kataib*, or battalions, join ISGS. In June 2017, Sultan Ould Bady's Katibat Salaheddine merged with ISGS. Around the same time, in early summer 2017, a group of Tolebe Fulani defected from Katibat Macina, another al-Qaeda-affiliated group, and joined ISGS.[122] Rumors circulated that other jihadi groups had pledged allegiance as well.[123]

Nevertheless, despite its growing number of attacks, increased visibility, and the growing numbers of fighters in its ranks, ISGS's connections to IS Central remained nominal at best. Indeed, until the end of summer 2017, IS Central had historically ignored ISGS, with little evidence of true support or interaction between them beyond the very delayed recognition of its *bayah*. Yet, if ISGS sought a way to get IS Central's attention, its next move put it squarely in the spotlight.

* * *

The Tongo Tongo Ambush

*

Western Niger
October 2–4, 2017

More than a decade before ISGS's emergence, in the post-9/11 era, the United States and many of its allies had already begun to view Niger and its environs as potential hotbeds of insecurity. In 2002, the US began sending

military personnel to Niger to "train and assist" the Nigerien military at least partly to stave off a would-be jihadi threat, an effort that increased after the takeover of northern Mali in 2012.[124] Alongside its train and assist missions, the US has, since 2015,[125] spent some $100 million to renovate an airfield outside the city of Agadez in the remote Nigerien Sahara. Called Niger Air Base 201, the airfield is intended to house the US's armed drone program, for surveilling the harsh desert landscape for sub-national violent extremists.[126] It was in this context of the US's post-9/11 concern about Niger's fragility and potential as a haven for jihadi groups that a convoy of US soldiers found themselves in the village of Tongo Tongo in western Niger on that ill-fated day, October 4, 2017.

The members of the joint US and Nigerien convoy had been sent out on a very specific mission two days before, to capture or kill a senior ISGS member, Doundoun Cheffou. A cattle herder of Fulani ethnicity, Cheffou—whose real name is Ibrahim Ousmane[127]—had made a name for himself by his involvement in the October 2016 kidnapping of Jeffery Woodke. Woodke, an American Christian aid worker, had devoted the previous twenty-four years to helping western Niger's nomadic Tuareg populations by means of development projects ranging from farming and literacy to providing access to potable water and healthcare. On the night of October 14, 2016, two men broke into Woodke's house in the town of Abalak,[128] killing two guards before driving away, with Woodke in tow, west towards Mali.[129]

Doundoun Cheffou was suspected of orchestrating Woodke's abduction and serving as his caretaker while the latter was in custody. Owing to his presumed complicity in the kidnapping of an American,[130] US officials, in combination with their Nigerien counterparts, had been on the lookout for Cheffou—whom they had given the code-name Naylor Road—in the hope that he could lead them to the American hostage.[131]

On October 2, 2017, a US Special Operations Forces team[132] based in Ouallam, Niger, nearly a hundred kilometers north of the capital of Niamey, received a ping from Cheffou's cell phone.[133] The transmission indicated Cheffou's presence near the town of Tiloa, on the outskirts of the Ansongo-Menaka Wildlife Reserve, on Niger's border with Mali,[134] where al-Sahraoui had fled upon being ousted from the Malian town of Gao, and

where ISGS's operations were based. The US team quickly deployed surveillance aircraft to confirm Cheffou's presence there. Soon thereafter, a "conception of operations," or CONOPs, was submitted to US and Nigerien civilian–military reconnaissance in Tiloa to be carried out the next day, October 3. The proposed mission's stated purpose was simple: to pinpoint the location of, and then capture or kill, Cheffou.

With the plan in hand, a convoy consisting of a combination of American and Nigerien forces[135] departed from their base in Ouallam on October 3. So as not to raise suspicion among locals, the team drove in unarmored vehicles: two pickup trucks and a black SUV for the eleven Americans, and five more pickup trucks for the thirty Nigeriens in the convoy. Almost all their vehicles were equipped with machine guns located in the beds of the trucks.[136] However, upon arriving in Tiloa, where Cheffou was believed to be, the American and Nigerien convoy could not locate their target. Unsuccessful, they decided to return to their base in Ouallam.

On the way back, however, the team received intelligence that Cheffou had rematerialized. This time, he was believed to be northwest of Tiloa—where they had just been—in an outdoor camp. The team turned back to attempt to clear Cheffou's encampment, navigating north of Tiloa through the night of October 3.

The convoy arrived at the camp where Cheffou was presumed to be hiding under the darkness of night on the morning of October 4, an ideal time to launch a secret raid. Located on the Nigerien side of the border with Mali, the campsite was, according to the *New York Times*, "hidden under a canopy of trees and set back in the rocks."[137] However, by the time the convoy arrived, its members found the camp abandoned, though seemingly only recently so. Machine gun bullets and anti-aircraft rounds littered the site;[138] an enemy uniform had been left behind, and so too a motorcycle.[139] Food rations—sugar, flour, and tea[140]—seemed to have been hastily abandoned, and the site's fire pit was still warm.[141] A series of motorcycle tracks left in the sand likewise indicated that the site's residents had made a departure not long before.[142] Despite all indications of recent presence, the main target, Doundoun Cheffou, was nowhere to be found.[143] After destroying what they could—including the motorcycle—the team began to return to their home base in Ouallam once again. They departed from Cheffou's abandoned camp at 8:30 a.m.[144]

At 10:30 that morning, the convoy came upon the first larger settlement that it had seen since leaving the abandoned camp: the village of Tongo Tongo. Typical for the Tillabéri region of Niger, Tongo Tongo is a rural village situated in the Sahel. The land is dry and sustains only the cultivation of grains like millet and sorghum. The village's dwellings, some 160 to 170 huts made of mud bricks,[145] are scattered about. Dirt paths, not paved roads, are the main thoroughfares in Tongo Tongo, a community composed of Zarma people, the second largest ethnic group in Niger, who own and raise grazing animals like camels, cattle, goats, and sheep, in addition to being known as farmers.

The convoy of Americans and Nigeriens, having left in the morning, wanted food and water, and sought to procure both in Tongo Tongo. As they arrived at the village, the chief, Mounkaila Alassane, met them and held an audience with them. He told them that many children in the village were sick—introducing them to one[146]—and requested medicine from the troops. The soldiers' decision to distribute medicine led to a broader impromptu community engagement with the village elders, and a second engagement with some twenty-seven other men from the village. At one point, the village chief showed them a goat that he suggested slaughtering for them.[147] Eventually, some soldiers began to feel that the meeting was running significantly longer than they had anticipated, as if they were intentionally being stalled.[148] Other US soldiers would later recall that during the engagement, they saw various motorbikes hastily speeding out of the village, as if time was of the essence.[149] After the prolonged conversation was concluded, the Americans and Nigeriens boarded their vehicles—three American-driven vehicles and five Nigerien ones—to complete the trip back to Ouallam.

Scarcely one hundred yards from the village, the battle began. The convoy's eight vehicles all came under fire from behind. Although the gunfire was initially light, it soon grew in intensity. Machine gun fire rang out first and mortars and rocket-propelled grenades barraged from behind.[150] The prolonged talks with the elders, it appeared, had been part of a tactic to stall the soldiers. The convoy had fallen into an ambush set up by ISGS.[151]

As soon as the US and Nigerien soldiers recognized the situation they were in, the eight vehicles in the convoy stopped. The soldiers exited and,

using their vehicles as shields, began to return fire. The presence of ISGS fighters began growing, particularly on the eastern front, as militants rode in to flank the convoy on motorcycles and vehicles with mounted machine guns. Soon, one of the five Nigerien pickup trucks fled, and, not long after, two other Nigerien vehicles departed south, fleeing from the ISGS militants' fire.[152]

Of the soldiers that had exited their unarmored SUVs to engage in fire with the IS ambushers there were three US Green Berets: Staff Sergeant Jeremiah Johnson, Staff Sergeant Bryan Black, and Staff Sergeant Dustin Wright. At 11:57, in order to avoid being overwhelmed by the growing ISGS element flanking from the east, the group's commander ordered the convoy to begin moving south. SSG Johnson confirmed the commander's order with a thumbs-up. To conceal the vehicle's movement, a smoke grenade was detonated. SSG Wright, who was also outside one of the ambushed vehicles, re-entered the second of the three US vehicles, and slowly began driving it forward. SSG Johnson and SSG Black stayed outside, walking alongside the vehicle, using it as a moving shield while firing at ISGS members.[153]

As SSG Wright drove the unarmored SUV—which scarcely provided any protection from enemy fire—SSG Black walked slightly in front of it, crouching behind the moving shield. SSG Johnson followed behind towards the rear of the car. Shots from the enemy hit the SUV as Black continued to engage in fire. At a certain point, it is believed that he walked slightly too far in front of the car, leaving him exposed to the militants' fire. Bryan Black was the first US soldier killed, taken down by small arms fire from ISGS. Seeing that their comrade had been hit, Wright and Johnson went to his side. Eventually, they too were overtaken by enemy fire, and were forced to abandon Black. Fleeing on foot, they ran into the desert outside the village of Tongo Tongo, while ISGS members pursued them on foot and in vehicles. Some eighty-five meters southwest of the vehicle from which they had fled, Johnson was shot. Wright stopped and returned to him, firing while doing so. Both were killed by ISGS forces.[154]

Meanwhile, two Nigerien soldiers and a US Green Beret, SSG La David Johnson, who had gotten out of the vehicles to exchange fire, had, in the midst of the battle, inadvertently been left behind by their teammates. The three abandoned soldiers ran into the brush, attempting to flee on foot. It was not long before the two Nigeriens were shot and killed by small arms

fire, only 400 meters from where they had left their vehicle.[155] For his part, Johnson continued running from ISGS militants, who pursued him by vehicle. With no options available for concealment in the scrub of the sparse Nigerien desert, he sought refuge in one of the few possible "hiding" spots available: a thorn tree. Johnson would be the fourth US Green Beret taken down by ISGS, killed by small arms fire.[156]

The vehicle which had left Johnson and the two Nigeriens behind continued north in an attempt to escape. With the enemy in pursuit, it headed towards a wooded area, ultimately getting stuck in mud. The team radioed that they were being overrun at 12:33. Fearing that ISGS militants would take their radios upon their capture, the soldiers disabled them, effectively cutting off any further communication with the outside. At that point, seven Americans and four Nigeriens abandoned the vehicle, which was still immobile. Wading through a swamp to prevent the enemy from following them, they succeeded in losing the ISGS soldiers, who continued to fire. The team found themselves in a clearing on the other side of the wooded area and swamp. Assuming that ISGS militants would soon locate and kill them, the remaining members of the US and Nigerien convoy wrote goodbye notes to loved ones on their cell phones.[157]

All was not lost, however. By 13:11, US unarmed aerial vehicles established communication with the team on the other side of the swamp. Minutes after, at 13:18, two French Mirage planes arrived. Unable to distinguish friend from foe, the Mirage planes instead conducted a show of force to threaten the ISGS militants. Though they stopped chasing the team of US and Nigerien soldiers, the militants did not retreat until two more French shows of force at tree-top level at 14:58. With ISGS militants cleared from the area, French helicopters arrived at 16:00. After the arrival of a Nigerien response team—which inadvertently fired on the team for forty-eight seconds, despite one of the members flying an American flag to show his identity—French helicopters landed by 16:55 and, soon thereafter, evacuated the remaining members of the Nigerien and American convoy.[158]

All told, in the aftermath of the Tongo Tongo attack, the convoy lost nine of its forty-one members: the four US Green Berets, four Nigerien soldiers,[159] and one Nigerien interpreter. The Tongo Tongo Ambush, as it would be known, constituted the largest US loss of life in a military conflict in sub-Saharan Africa since 1993, when eighteen US Special Operations

soldiers were killed in Mogadishu in the Black Hawk Down incident. For its part, the US–Nigerien team killed an estimated twenty to twenty-five Islamic State militants.[160]

Despite wide-ranging assumptions that ISGS has been responsible, the group stayed silent. Indeed, it would not claim responsibility for the attack until January 2018, nearly three months later, when it asserted responsibility through the Mauritanian news agency ANI.[161] Reasons for the delay are unknown.[162]

What role, if any, did IS Central have in this attack? As with other IS "sovereign subordinates" around the continent, the primary link between ISGS and IS Central in respect of the Tongo Tongo attack appears to have been limited to their media connections. On March 4, 2018, IS Central released on Telegram footage from the helmet cam video worn by SSG Jeremiah Johnson, edited together with ISGS's own footage of the battle, with a *nashid*, or Islamic religious chant, playing in the background. The low-quality and shaky video showed selective sequences of the battle between the US–Nigerien convoy and ISGS militants, including the bodies of Black, Wright, and Johnson, partly stripped of belongings.[163] Despite the fact that the attack footage was released by a pro-IS channel and thus presumably showed that ISGS members had relayed the footage to IS Central, there has been little open-source evidence to suggest that al-Sahraoui and ISGS had any degree of coordination with IS Central prior to the attack. This is not unexpected, since it was apparently an opportunistic crime and was not premeditated. To the extent that the attack had any meaning for the wider IS network, anonymous Nigerien and Malian security sources stated—though speculatively—that the attack "brought al-Sahraoui respect and money from ISIS and its other affiliates, such as Boko Haram in neighboring Nigeria."[164] And what of Doundoun Cheffou, the original target of the ill-fated mission? While Nigerien forces thought that they had apprehended him in March 2018,[165] he remained at large at the time of al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019.

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PART THREE
THE POST-BAYAH PERIOD

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The Sahelian Anomaly: ISGS's Relations with al-Qaeda

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Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso
April 2018–October 2019

While the Tongo Tongo attack put ISGS on the map, it still had not achieved affiliate utility validation and become a *wilaya*. Nevertheless, throughout 2018 the group continued to grow in violence, attacking both civilians and members of the Malian, Nigerien, and Burkinabe states. On April 8, 2018, ISGS fighters assassinated the mayor of the commune of Koutougou, Burkina Faso, for having collaborated with multinational counterterror forces fighting ISGS.[166] Between April 26 and April 27, ISGS is also presumed to have been responsible for attacks carried out against Tuaregs, in which forty were killed.[167] The United States designated ISGS a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) in May 2018.[168]

Throughout this time, while ISGS's connection with IS Central remained murky to non-existent, it increasingly became clear that it still retained some degree of connection to the broader al-Qaeda universe from which it had sprung. Most notably, ISGS soon showed that it had maintained continuous cooperation with the main al-Qaeda group in the Sahel, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM),[169] an umbrella group of al-Qaeda-affiliated insurgent groups[170] that coalesced in March 2017. Indeed, unlike other Islamic State and al-Qaeda affiliates operating in the same spaces around the world,[171] ISGS and JNIM remained on cordial and often cooperative terms for years. So exceptional globally was this relationship that it came to be known as "the Sahelien exception."[172]

Signs that ISGS and AQIM and JNIM would exist on friendly terms came early in the former's life cycle. In January 2016, just seven months after al-Sahraoui's May 2015 pledge, Yahya Abu al-Hammam,[173] the Algerian emir of al-Qaeda in the Sahara, told a Mauritanian media outlet that although he was disappointed al-Sahraoui had defected from the

broader AQIM umbrella to join the Islamic State—which he deemed an illegitimate caliphate—"contact had not been totally broken" between the two groups.[174] Indeed, *Jeune Afrique* speculated that the leaders of the two groups met each other in Mali in December 2017, and that al-Sahraoui met with AQIM lieutenants days later.[175] Moreover, as already mentioned, AQIM commander Belmokhtar had purportedly visited the ISGS camp where the hostage Wahid claimed to have seen him.[176]

By January 2018, there were signs that ISGS was continuing to cooperate with its recently emerged al-Qaeda counterpart, JNIM. In that month, a spokesman of ISGS called Amar declared to AFP that ISGS and al-Qaeda groups were "fighting together" and gave each other support against their mutual enemies: the French Army and the G-5 Sahel,[177] an anti-terror coalition composed of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad, which received assistance from France. In an interview with newspapers, the ISGS spokesman affirmed that despite allegiances to two differing "parent" jihadi groups, the Islamic State and al-Qaeda in the Sahel were "together … going to do everything we can to keep the G-5 Sahel from installing a presence here … To combat these miscreants, we are aiding one another. We shall continue to fight together."[178] In addition to the groups' own declarations, members of the UN's MINUSMA peacekeeping mission in Mali and France's Barkhane counterterror forces also indicated that the two groups were cooperating;[179] one member of Barkhane noted that although ISGS and JNIM were two separate movements with ideologically differing parent groups, they nevertheless "promptly form opportunistic alliances."[180] Despite this cooperation, ISGS and JNIM did not share planning or fusion,[181] nor did their occasional cooperation necessarily mean there was no competition between them.[182] However, this detente was not to last, ironically perhaps, owing to the elevation in status that ISGS had long sought.

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A Delayed Status Elevation

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Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso
March–October 2019

For nearly its entire life until al-Baghdadi's death, ISGS's known connections to IS Central remained marginal: the initial seventeen-month delay from pledge to mere recognition signified the general indifference with which the Islamic State historically treated ISGS. Between 2015 and early 2019, there were no confirmed open-source instances of funding or weapons transfers to ISGS from IS Central. Even in the media sphere—one of the few spaces where IS African affiliates do tend to have links to IS Central—ISGS had been an essential non-player: for the duration of its existence, IS Central had only rarely mentioned ISGS in any of its publications, nor had ISGS created its own media wing.[183] As Caleb Weiss has remarked, "Since 2016 … ISGS has continuously been neglected by the Islamic State's central media apparatus, with only sporadic references afforded to it by the group's various media outlets."[184] Instead, ISGS was forced to disseminate its propaganda through informal channels or Mauritanian news sites.[185] Thus, while many other African IS groups have been "sovereign subordinates," with their only real connection being media ones, even these marginal media connections did not exist for ISGS.[186] Indeed, for almost the entirety of ISGS's existence, there were no clues to suggest ISGS maintained any substantial relationship with IS Central at all.

This distant relationship between ISGS and IS Central would soon shift by early 2019. Beginning in spring 2019, ISGS began receiving regular attention from formal IS media outlets.[187] The first official IS Central media releases came on March 22, 2019, when it released a picture of ISGS soldiers in Burkina Faso, referring to them for the first time as part of "the Islamic State's West Africa Province." The photograph, believed to be more than a year old at the time of publication, showed seven fighters uniformly dressed in military fatigues during a pledge of allegiance ceremony near the village of Touka-Bayel, in the northern Seno province.[188]

The reference to ISGS as part of ISWAP caused some confusion among analysts, and raised two important questions. First, why had IS Central decided to elevate ISGS to the status of a "wing" and, second, what was the nature of the relationship between the new ISWAP–Greater Sahara wing and the ISWAP in northeastern Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin? The first

answer proved to be more straightforward than the second. Ultimately, IS Central appears to have elevated ISGS to a wing of ISWAP precisely because at that moment, in March 2019, ISGS proved its utility as an affiliate for the crumbling territorial caliphate. That this release came on the day before IS Central was to lose its last piece of territory in Baghouz, Syria, is no coincidence. The elevation of ISGS was a diversionary tactic to demonstrate that even as it was facing losses in Syria, it was apparently expanding in the Sahel.

The answer to the second question was less clear: what did this new elevation mean about ISWAP–Greater Sahara's relationship with ISWAP in Nigeria? Historically, details about interactions between the two groups had been scant. As early as March 2017, *Le Figaro* suggested that al-Sahraoui had been in contact with the leader of ISWAP, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, and that the two were forming a relationship to extend ISWAP's presence into Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Some Malian and Nigerien security forces told reporters that the Tongo Tongo attack had "gained Sahraoui respect from his superiors,"[189] including in IS–West Africa Province, though there is no evidence to prove these links.

Despite ambiguity about the meaning of relations with ISWAP, the stage shifted when IS Central began to highlight much more vigorously the activities of its new ISWAP–Greater Sahara group. On March 28, 2019, it released a two-page spread in its *Al-Naba* magazine, providing a rundown of ISGS's insurgency in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Most notably, it featured photocopies of identity cards belonging to the US soldier Dustin Wright, taken in Tongo Tongo, Niger, and that of Canadian geologist Kirk Woodman, who worked in the mining industry in Burkina Faso for a Vancouver-owned company.[190] Later, on April 3, IS Central released the first combat footage from ISGS in Mali, which showed an attack in Akabar in the northern Menaka region in March 2019.[191] In an audiovisual speech released on April 28—his last video appearance before his death—al-Baghdadi explicitly called on IS members to intensify attacks against France and its allies in the Sahel region.[192] Seemingly in response, militants stepped up their activity in May 2019,[193] ambushing and killing twenty-nine members of the Nigerien Army[194] in what was the deadliest attack on forces in the Tillabéri region.[195] Following its rise in the IS Central's media in spring 2019, ISGS's apparent southward expansion led to cause for

concern, with think tanks like the African Center for Strategic Studies worrying that, along with other jihadist groups, it was making a push towards Benin, Togo, and northern Ghana.[196]

As its provincial status changed, so shifts occurred in ISGS's historically cooperative relationship with JNIM. After ISGS's formal incorporation into the Islamic State's organizational structure in March 2019 as a distinct "Greater Sahara" wing of ISWAP, tensions mounted between ISGS and JNIM. It only took months until the first skirmishes between the two groups broke out. In July 2019, a clash was reported in the village of Ariel, in Burkina Faso,[197] followed by a skirmish in September in Haoussa-Foulane, near Gao in Mali.[198] Despite its elevation, ISWAP–Greater Sahara's relationship with IS Central would not deepen outside the media sphere. By October 2019, there had still been no open-source evidence of financial transfers, arms transfers, or training and assistance. ISWAP–Greater Sahara was, as it has always been, a profoundly sovereign subordinate of IS Central.

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The Islamic State in Greater Sahara at the Time of al-Baghdadi's Death

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Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso
October 2019

At the time of al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019, ISWAP–Greater Sahara was on an upward trajectory, in terms of both its violence and its relative importance to IS Central. In the profoundly al-Qaeda-rife landscape of the politically volatile, ethnically charged, and economically undeveloped Mali–Niger–Burkina Faso borderlands, the global rise of the Islamic State served to democratize jihad. It was there, in the midst of a network of competing violent groups seeking to capitalize on state collapse and ethnic tensions, that Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahraoui, an aspirant though frustrated jihadi fighter, abandoned a series of al-Qaeda-affiliated groups to pledge allegiance to the Islamic State. His efforts to achieve affiliate utility validation were hard won: even to achieve mere recognition from IS Central

required seventeen months and would occur only after his group demonstrated its prowess in undertaking meaningful attacks in the name of the Islamic State with a spate of notable attacks in late 2016 and the Tongo Tongo ambush in 2017. Despite these efforts, the group was met with general indifference from IS Central, and there is little evidence of connection or even meaningful communication. Instead, ISGS has had all of the markings of a "sovereign subordinate": ostensibly under the purview of IS Central, ISGS had historically been far more involved in the local and especially ethnic politics of the Sahel region, which themselves were often dominated by al-Qaeda-affiliated groups with whom ISGS sometimes cooperated. And though it would be elevated to serve as a wing of ISWAP by March 2019—accompanied by greater visibility in media—it remained largely a group on its own.

Nevertheless, with al-Baghdadi's death, ISWAP–Greater Sahara, like other IS affiliates around the continent, re-pledged allegiance on November 9, 2019.[199] Despite this leader's death, the group lost little in the way of benefits: having received little from IS Central beyond the brand itself, al-Sahraoui and his followers advanced forward with their activities, little perturbed, seemingly, by the death of al-Baghdadi.

8

THE ISLAMIC STATE IN SOMALIA

PART ONE
THE PRE-BAYAH PERIOD

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The Rise of the Islamic State's Parent Group:
The Emergence of al-Shabaab

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Somalia
1991–2019

The Islamic State in Somalia was formed from a faction group from al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda's branch in East Africa. Meaning "the Youth," al-Shabaab publicly arose in 2006 in an attempt to fill a power vacuum in Somalia that was left following the collapse of the government of President Siad Barre in January 1991. Members of the Somali Rebellion, angered by Barre's authoritarian tendencies and a declining economy, precipitated the downfall of his regime and the start of the Somali Civil War. After Barre's ouster, the situation in Somalia degenerated into a series of clan-based skirmishes. For months, no group was able to hold the capital or provide an

effective means of governance. This all changed with the rise of the warlord Mohammed Farah Aidid, who began to exert a modicum of control over parts of the country through a network of clan-based fighters.[1]

When Aidid prevented international food aid from reaching Somali civilians, the United States, under President Bill Clinton, intervened. On October 3, 1993, in an effort to capture two of Aidid's advisors, a team of US Rangers entered Mogadishu in an operation that was intended to last an hour. While the objectives were achieved, the raid was ultimately botched, when militants brought down a US Black Hawk attack helicopter in a battle extending into the next day, which ultimately required a rescue mission for the US troops. In the end, eighteen US soldiers lost their lives in the infamous "Black Hawk Down" incident, which not only put Somalia on the map for many in the West, but also engendered US skepticism toward heavy intervention in future African conflicts.[2] In the aftermath of the failed operation, for much of the 1990s and early 2000s, Somalia could rightly be described as a completely failed state.

After nearly a decade of anarchy in which neither successive Somali governments nor clan-based militias could effectively exert power, a group known as the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) began to cohere into a governing entity in the early 2000s,[3] enforcing its will through militia-based violence.[4] By 2006, the ICU—a loosely affiliated collection of eleven local clan-based sharia courts that had merged to impose traditional forms of Islamic governance, jurisprudence, and ethics—set up a functioning form of governance in southern Somalia. That a clan-based system of governance emerged as a substitute for an absentee state was no surprise. In Somalia, accumulation of power and wealth and participation in political and cultural life have historically been mediated through clans or sub-clans, or familial genealogical lineages.[5] Somali politics have been intertwined with allegiance to the clan system—there are at least five major Somali clans, each with varying numbers of sub-clans—to such an extent that, as Stig Hansen notes, the clan "becomes a constructed filter for social reality."[6] As will be shown, these clan politics would play an important role in the emergence of IS–Somalia.

As the sharia-centric ICU became stronger and more robust, it eventually displaced the warlords, who had opposed the fledgling Somali federal government, the UN-mandated Transitional Federal Government

(TFG, which was created between 2002 and 2004 and existed until 2012). With the ICU's rise, Somalia's southern neighbor, Ethiopia, became nervous. In addition to worrying that potential al-Qaeda operatives were being hosted in Somalia by the ICU, Addis Ababa also feared that the ICU's presence in Somalia could lead to the rise of Somali nationalism within Ethiopia, inspiring Muslims in that country, which form between 30 percent and 40 percent of its population, to seek greater autonomy.

In July 2006, Ethiopian troops, backed by the United States, entered Somalia ostensibly to prop up the fledgling TFG forces against the Islamist ICU, but also intending to dismantle the ICU. Interpreting the Ethiopian and US presence in Somalia as an invasion, the ICU declared war but it was routed near the city of Baidoa in late 2006. In the aftermath of its defeat, many of the ICU's members went into exile, while others transformed into the group that would come to be known as al-Shabaab. Eventually, remaining militias were eventually absorbed back into al-Shabaab, which would resume the fight against Ethiopia and the TFG, framing its violence as a form of defensive, anti-imperialist jihad.[7]

Between late 2006 and the first half of 2014, al-Shabaab was one of the preeminent security threats in sub-Saharan Africa. While between 2007 and 2008 it was rightfully thought of as a guerrilla organization, by 2009 it was on its way to exerting territorial control.[8] By March 2008, it had been designated as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) by the United States. Since its inception, al-Shabaab has sought to institute its version of sharia law, which also entailed ridding Somalia of the presence of its government, which had been propped up since 2007 by the United Nations and by the UN-supported African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM),[9] a peacekeeping force sent in to eradicate it. To achieve these goals, al-Shabaab's tactics involved insurgency in the service of state-building. Al-Shabaab has used a combination of asymmetric military tactics—especially improvised explosive devices (IEDs), suicide bombings, and raids—while it has attempted to govern through sharia, meting out punishments such as stonings, amputations, and beheadings to those unwilling to accept its rule.[10] Despite nearly a decade of fighting al-Shabaab, the international community, led by a combination of the United Nations, the African Union, the United States, and European Union countries, had, by October 2019, only marginally weakened the organization,[11] if at all.

Throughout its life cycle, at least part of al-Shabaab's staying power had been its relationship with al-Qaeda, for which it served as the latter's East African branch. At the core of the eventual connection between the two was al-Shabaab's intellectual lineage with the group known as al-Itihaad al-Islamiya (AIAI). Founded between 1982 and 1984, AIAI was Wahhabist in orientation and the first militant Islamic organization in Somalia post-1991.[12] Importantly, AIAI itself had ties with al-Qaeda, which had had a presence in Somalia as early as 1991.[13] Indeed, al-Qaeda affiliates had been on the ground during the October 1993 Black Hawk Down incident,[14] and al-Qaeda had provided training to the operators.[15] Later, it would also have some involvement in the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania,[16] which was facilitated by an alleged meeting between Aidid and Osama bin Laden in the mid-1990s, when Bin Laden lived in Khartoum, Sudan.[17] Though AIAI would be defeated, some of its sympathies for al-Qaeda would endure in Somalia, and some of its former members would eventually become leaders in al-Shabaab.[18]

For its part, al-Shabaab, which was established in 2002, had its own history of interaction with al-Qaeda. In addition to hosting operatives for al-Qaeda in East Africa (AQEA), by 2003, it launched its first attack, killing aid workers in Somaliland.[19] Following the ouster of the ICU in late 2006, al-Shabaab began cementing its membership base[20] while becoming ever close to al-Qaeda.[21] Within al-Shabaab, beginning in 2008, Saleh Ali Nabhan, who would later serve as the leader of al-Qaeda in Somalia, pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. (Nabhan was killed by US Navy Seals in September 2009.)[22] Later, in 2009, al-Shabaab's new leader, Ahmed Abdi Godane, exhorted al-Qaeda to show al-Shabaab leadership when he released a video entitled "At Your Service, O Osama." Bin Laden acknowledged this support, and, in 2010, approved a merger with Al-Shabaab.[23] However, publicly, he did not offer al-Shabaab the distinction of accreditation as a formal branch. To that end, he advised al-Shabaab to keep their mutual communications quiet, particularly be-cause revealing them would make al-Shabaab more vulnerable to counterterrorism efforts. Yet, it is unclear whether al-Qaeda's reluctance to publicly elevate al-Shabaab to branch status was a result of security

concerns for al-Shabaab or whether it questioned the potential benefits of such a merger at all.[24]

The shift for al-Shabaab from an undercover al-Qaeda "friend" to an official, public branch came after the death of Bin Laden in May 2011 and, more importantly, the accession of al-Qaeda's new leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri. As Barak Mendelsohn has noted, al-Zawahiri had less stringent standards for accepting global affiliates than Bin Laden did.[25] On February 9, 2012, al-Qaeda's media arm announced the emergence of its East Africa branch, al-Shabaab,[26] even though the exact relationship between the two remains a debated question. Christopher Anzalone has suggested that al-Qaeda was interested in al-Shabaab's territorial control, while Abdi Ayinte has argued that al-Qaeda viewed Somalia as a potential safe haven for al-Qaeda affiliates ousted from Afghanistan.[27] Assaf Moghadam has suggested that the elevation may have been intended to raise al-Qaeda's international image, as it was in apparent decline,[28] a trend that IS Central followed during its own decline, when it created the new two-winged Central Africa Province spanning DRC and Mozambique when its own territorial caliphate evaporated in 2019.

And yet, despite robust connections with al-Qaeda, many al-Shabaab members watched in awe as the Islamic State rose to global prominence in Iraq and Syria in 2014. Despite holding allegiance to a different global parent group—al-Qaeda—some members of al-Shabaab had few qualms about showing respect for al-Zarqawi, the founder of al-Qaeda in Iraq, the group that would eventually become the Islamic State.[29] And though by mid-2014 al-Shabaab, itself al-Qaeda's branch in Somalia, was firmly rooted as the preeminent jihadi presence in Somalia, the meteoric rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria led some members—as happened elsewhere on the African continent—to openly question the group's historical allegiance to al-Qaeda. The Islamic State's democratization of jihad had spread to Somalia as well.

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The Islamic State's Charm Offensive

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Somalia
2015

As it had done with members of Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM) in Sinai (chapter 4), the Islamic State made moves to attract al-Shabaab into its orbit. Beginning in 2015,[30] IS Central launched a charm offensive, attempting to get al-Shabaab to renounce its affiliation to al-Qaeda, and join the Islamic State's caliphate. The first instance occurred in February 2015 when an IS supporter wrote an article asking al-Shabaab to join the Islamic State's caliphate, questioning, "When will we hear, oh dear brothers, of 'Wilaya Somalia?'"[31] Through 2015, other IS supporters from outside Somalia also wrote similar pieces. In the pleas, IS loyalists referred to al-Shabaab's members as "roaring lions," "steadfast mountains," and the "new generation of the [IS] caliphate."[32] In the course of making these early appeals, IS attempted to win over the hearts and minds of al-Shabaab's foot soldiers—its foreign fighters. Appealing to a sense of jihadi adventurism, it sought to show al-Shabaab's rank and file the superior lifestyles they could lead under the banner of the Islamic State. Instead of their existing status as second-class, "outsider" members, they would be allowed to plan operations,[33] and not simply participate in them.

Al-Shabaab wanted none of this. Although it has seemingly never spoken about the Islamic State's overtures to it publicly, internally the group was livid at the suggestion that it abandon its affiliation with al-Qaeda. According to a report from September 2015, an internal al-Shabaab memo stated that "the group's policy is to continue allegiance with al-Qaeda and that any attempt to create discord over this position [in suggesting an alliance with the Islamic State] will be dealt with accordingto Islamic law."[34] In the same vein, an al-Shabaab radio station issued a similar warning in November 2015, cautioning its members that "if anyone says he belongs to another Islamic movement [other than al-Qaeda] kill him on the spot … we will cut the throat of anyone … if they undermine unity."[35] Similarly, al-Shabaab's spokesman Ali Mohamud (or "Maxamuud") Rage warned members against showing sympathy towards the Islamic State, warning that those that sought to undermine the unity of al-Shabaab would be "burnt in hell."[36] Al-Shabaab rapidly proved that these threats were not empty. As some of its members began to show sympathy

towards upstart IS cells, al-Shabaab sent out members of its notorious security service, the Amniyat, to arrest or kill them.[37]

But the Islamic State's online charm offensive was far from over. While the previous exhortations had come simply from individual IS supporters, in early October 2015 the official media wings of five IS provinces called on al-Shabaab to leave al-Qaeda and join the Islamic State. The media departments of the provinces in Ninawa (Iraq), Homs (Syria), Sinai (Egypt), Raqqa (Syria), and Baraka (Syria) all released videos in a coordinated effort aimed at al-Shabaab members.[38] Moreover, signaling a degree of intra-African IS sympathy, an official IS video was released on October 14 from the media office of the Islamic State West Africa Province, calling on the brothers of Somalia to join the Islamic State.[39]

Despite the threats that al-Shabaab levied against its would-be defectors, some adherents found relevance in the Islamic State's brand. Particularly for the more internationalist-minded members (especially its foreign fighters), the Islamic State's appeal to a global jihad held greater intrinsic promise than al-Shabaab's far more parochial goals in Somalia,[40] and some began to express ideological support for—if not actual fidelity towards—al-Baghdadi.[41] That questioning of the existing allegiance to al-Qaeda, it turned out, would be the impetus for the formation of IS–Somalia, led by Abdulqadir Mumin.

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PART TWO
THE BAYAH PERIOD

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Mumin Pledges

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Somalia
2015

The progenitor of IS–Somalia was Abdulqadir Mumin, a Somali-born British citizen, who pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in October 2015. Known for his long orange-red henna-dyed beard, Mumin was born in Puntland around 1950. At some point in the 2000s, Mumin traveled to the UK and Sweden, where he lived and gained a reputation within his community as an extremist preacher.[42] By 2010, Mumin had become known as a radical imam, and, as a result, the British intelligence agency MI5 began tracking him on suspicion that he was responsible for radicalizing Britons in London and Manchester.[43] In 2010, in an effort to avoid further scrutiny from MI5, Mumin burned his British passport and declared his commitment to returning to his native Somalia to wage jihad.[44]

Upon his return, Mumin set to work making a name for himself. One year after his arrival, Mumin was asked to give a speech at al-Shabaab's ceremony commemorating the death of Osama bin Laden in May 2011,[45] an important task for a group with long-standing—and occasionally frayed—ties with al-Qaeda. Perhaps ironically in retrospect, al-Shabaab included Mumin in a video in which it formalized its relationship with al-Qaeda Core in 2012. Soon after, as AMISOM, along with the Somali National Army, took up a more aggressive posture toward al-Shabaab, Mumin was instrumental in launching a ground campaign on behalf of al-Shabaab to convince members of various clans and their elders to retain allegiance to or join al-Shabaab, even in the face of pressure to defect from it or reject it. His targets of conversion were wide-ranging, focusing on power-brokers like clan elders and businessmen, as well as religious and cultural brokers like imams and poets.[46]

After two years in Somalia filling increasingly important symbolic and organization roles within al-Shabaab, by 2012, Mumin received a new task: rather than staying centered in al-Shabaab's fight against the Somali government in southern Somalia, he was instructed to travel north, to the relatively isolated and less important al-Shabaab outpost in the Golis mountains in the Puntland region of Somalia, where he hailed from and where al-Shabaab had arguably[47] had a presence since 2006.[48] His goals were several. First, Mumin was to serve as an al-Shabaab recruiter[49] in an area that was otherwise, at that time, not a main source of recruits for the group. Second, reports claim that Mumin sought to secure a new safe haven for al-Shabaab, and, third, ensure a reliable channel of communication with

Yemen,[50] from which al-Shabaab received numerous supplies, funding, and trainers, especially from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).[51] Fourth, some have also suggested that Mumin was sent to provide "adult supervision" and, fifth, ideological legitimacy.[52] Based in northern Somalia from 2012, Mumin served as an increasingly popular preacher, gaining a reputation as an important theologian and one of the spiritual leaders of the group. He also took his preaching online, appearing in sundry al-Shabaab videos as a propagandist for the group.[53]

Despite his rising profile in al-Shabaab's Puntland group, Mumin likely began to recognize that there were limits to his ascent given the all-importance of clan affiliation in Somali politics. Throughout his participation in the Puntland-based al-Shabaab branch, Mumin was always an outsider of sorts. Though he himself came from the Majeerteen/Ali Saleeban clans, the Puntland-based al-Shabaab branch in which he was embedded lay in territory of the Warsengeli clan. Even after the initial leader of the branch, Mohamed Said Atom[54] (himself Warsengeli) was recalled by al-Shabaab for fear that he had communicated with the Puntland authorities, the new emir who replaced him in 2010, Yasin Kilwe, was also Warsengeli.[55] As he came from a minority clan within the al-Shabaab branch in Puntland, there were limits to how far Mumin could ever climb. As Matt Bryden says, Mumin was essentially a "guest whose authority only extended as far as Kilwe permitted it."[56]

At some point, Mumin began to consider defection from al-Shabaab. Some have suggested that Mumin may have found the Islamic State's caliphate appealing, particularly given the group's prominence in the Middle East at the time.[57] Others have argued that Mumin may have been frustrated by Kilwe's ability to make inroads in Puntland.[58] Others in al-Shabaab were also apparently calling for a change in allegiance.[59] More to the point, it seems that Mumin had simply become frustrated by his inability to rise within the Puntland branch of al-Shabaab, not least because he was more often viewed as an ideologue than a commander.[60] Thus, on October 22, 2015, Mumin pledged allegiance, or *bayah*, to al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State.[61]

At the time of Mumin's pledge, his group's strength was limited. Best reporting shows that only around 20 of the nearly 300 al-Shabaab fighters

that he had been working with elected to join Mumin and his aspiring Islamic State branch.[62] Indeed, far more decided to stay within the al-Shabaab Puntland-based cell.[63] As Patrick Hubbard has argued, although Mumin originally sought to stay in the Golis mountains and base his new IS branch there—originally gaining more adherents in the range of 30 to 50 men—small clashes with al-Shabaab members during November 7–10, 2015, caused Mumin and his followers to flee the mountains with an estimated 18 members.[64] Mumin also likely viewed a physical move away from his home branch of al-Shabaab as beneficial to his own aspirations. As Matt Bryden has suggested, his decision to move to Qandala, where his own clan was based, likely signaled his belief that "with Daesh help, he could launch a more successful movement."[65] However, according to one Puntland Intelligence Agency official, Mumin had "wanted to make Daesh official within al-Shabaab for some time."[66] Beyond the physical departure from his old group's area of operation, his ideological departure signaled new opportunities for him. As Christopher Anzalone has summarized neatly:

> The rise of IS "core," Puntland's relative remoteness from al-Shabaab's "core," and local social (clan) dynamics … combined to lead Mumin into his bid to take over the "mujahideen" in Puntland. By pledging to al-Baghdadi, he was able to break away from al-Shabaab without making it seem like he was only pursuing his own "worldly" personal ambitions, to benefit to some degree (perhaps mostly in media reach) from IS "core," and to still remain relatively independent even from IS "core," in terms of day-to-day operations. In short, the IS umbrella and name gave a lot to Mumin while still allowing him a degree of independence that he did not have while in al-Shabaab.[67]

For its part, IS Central did not immediately respond to Mumin's pledge[68]—affiliate utility validation was not at all immediately forthcoming, not least by way of granting provincehood. Instead, it took nearly three months before IS Central first made reference to the group. In January 2016, it acknowledged the pledge from Mumin, referring to his soldiers as "our brothers" in Somalia, a term which it has generally used for

those that support or are inspired by its message. Indeed, unlike the pre-coordination of pledges that occurred in earlier instances of African *bayat*—from Libya, Algeria, Sinai, and ISWAP—there is little evidence to suggest a close initial connection between the two. Mumin's pledge to al-Baghdadi appears not to have been coordinated with the leadership of IS Central.[69]

Nevertheless, evidence has emerged to suggest lines of communication did exist between Mumin and IS Central. Reports have emerged to suggest that connections between IS Central and Mumin's Somalia cell began in secret, perhaps after the initial pledge but before formal recognition. Between late 2015 and early 2016, IS–Somalia reportedly obtained financial and training support, as well as military supplies, from IS Central, primarily through the latter's affiliates in Yemen.[70] This funding continued throughout late 2016.[71] According to IS–Somalia defectors, Mumin used an intermediary named Khalil Dheere—an al-Shabaab defector who moved to Yemen in 2013—to communicate with the Islamic State.[72] Credible intelligence also suggests that even prior to this official defection, Mumin may have traveled outside of Somalia to meet with Islamic State representatives, and that he may have received at least one weapons shipment facilitated by a "reformed" militia member, Isse Yulux, also prior to his defection from al-Shabaab.[73]

As 2016 progressed, IS Central continued to make mention of Mumin's group, though it would never confer upon it the status of an official *wilaya*. And, while Mumin's pledge to IS Central and defection from al-Shabaab occurred in Puntland, other, less influential[74] IS branches would later emerge in western and southern Somalia[75] as well,[76] though relationships between them and Mumin's cell are unclear. Ultimately, well into 2016, none of these groups achieved the goal of affiliate utility validation. Though Mumin's cell gained no official provincial recognition from IS Central by late 2016, it nevertheless ensured that its presence was felt.

* * *

The Siege of Qandala

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Qandala, Somalia
October–December 2016

The town of Qandala is a sleepy village on the Gulf of Aden on the northeastern coast of Somalia. On a typical day, fishermen leave early in the morning in trawlers to fish and their catches—tuna, swordfish or king mackerel—are sold to local merchants upon their return. With some twenty kilometers of duned beaches,[77] Qandala is flanked by the Red Sea in the east and the Golis mountains to the west. Qandala is out of the way, easier to reach by sea than over land. And, being located in Somalia's semi-autonomous region of Puntland,[78] it has been used to being left to its own devices. Through much of the 2010s, Qandala became more widely known as a home base for Somali pirates.[79]

Despite its relative isolation, Qandala has a storied local history, if perhaps only within Somalia. Emerging as an important port city in the 15th and 16th centuries, it attracted traders selling incense, ivory, aromatic woods, animal skins, and gums from the interior of present-day Somalia, eager to participate in the burgeoning trade between Africa and the Middle East. So wealthy did it become that one of Qandala's early nicknames, Gacanka Hodonka, means "Gulf of Prosperity."[80] Its robust fishing market led a former Somali government to locate a large fish-processing factory on its shores.[81] By the early 20th century, prior to World War I, Qandala was occupied by the Italians, after local leader Boqor Osman signed a treaty making Qandala part of an Italian protectorate. Qandala later retained some notoriety as the home of the Somali folk hero Ali Fahiye Gedi, who, angered by Qandala's takeover by Italy, defiantly lowered and then burned an Italian flag in protest against its occupation. Gedi was subsequently imprisoned by the Italians in 1914, and became a hero and martyr to many in the community. From that point on, both Gedi and Qandala would serve as what Harun Maruf has referred to as "traditional symbol[s] of staunch resistance to foreign occupation."[82]

In the early hours of October 26, 2016,[83] the pre-dawn quietness that normally characterized Qandala was broken when approximately sixty militants of IS–Somalia entered the town.[84] Armed with weapons they had allegedly stolen from al-Shabaab,[85] the militants marched in under the cover of darkness before daybreak. They began disabling

telecommunications, further isolating the remote town.[86] As the fisherman Abdirahman Hussein recalled, "We just saw Daesh (Islamic State) with their black banner as we were fishing."[87] Amaq video footage released later that day showed an older Somali man—very unsure, very nervous—watching the militants enter town.[88] Local law enforcement were quickly overrun and few security officials put up a fight.[89] On that October morning in 2016, Qandala failed to live up to its historical reputation as a bastion of resistance.

The IS militants wasted no time in making their presence known. After entering, they paraded around the town with the Black Standard, or *rayat al-uqab*, the Islamic State's black flag. Later that day, one of them climbed to the rooftops of several of the low-slung buildings, and flew the flag over the town's police station as well as the prison that had once housed Qandala's liberation hero, Ali Fahiye Gedi.[90] The takeover of the town was swift, even if, as the Islamic State's own video highlighted, the extent of the militants' actual activity—walking around town and raising the flag—was rather uninspiring.[91]

Once they realized what was occurring, residents of Qandala reacted varyingly. When they first arrived, the militants attempted to restrict citizens' movements, prohibiting them from leaving the town.[92] Some fishermen pleaded not to be hurt, since they were not related to the government or the state.[93] Other fishermen, already in their boats, sailed away, taking refuge in Burua, a larger port city further down the coast between Qandala and Bosaso.[94] Eventually, the militants relented, allowing some of Qandala's citizens to leave the town: many abandoned their homes in a hurry, leaving doors and windows open. Shops were deserted and left unlocked.[95] Tens of thousands of residents eventually fled from Qandala and the surrounding area—by foot, in car, and on boats[96]—as the Islamic State moved in, totaling more than half the district's population.[97] As figures of local authority, some town elders told the militants to leave but they retorted that they were not going anywhere.[98]

With their rapid takeover of the town complete, the IS fighters made their presence felt. The day after the occupation, schools in Qandala were closed.[99] On the second day, IS–Somalia's leader, Abdulqadir Mumin, began presenting sermons encouraging the citizens of Qandala to join the

Islamic State for the betterment of themselves and their city.[100] If they refused, they would suffer in the afterlife. In one early sermon, Mumin also made the case that the Islamic State's new Salafist rule would benefit everyone. For instance, he assured the town's fishermen—who constituted a majority of Qandala's workforce—that they would double the rates paid for their fish, from 300 shillings a day to 600 shillings. Security officials would get an even better deal: Mumin told them their salaries would rise from 100 shillings to 300 shillings for the first three months of IS rule.[101] Mumin's sermons began to be distributed over the radio and in person.[102]

Throughout their occupation of Qandala, the militants attempted to undertake many of the same governance initiatives as the Islamic State had done in other places in Africa. As in Libya, a new, stricter code of personal conduct was instituted. In addition to encouraging greater piety in general, women in Qandala were forced to wear *jilbaab* or *niqab*. Recreational drug use was prohibited. Prior to the Islamic State's arrival, both men and sometimes even women in Qandala were known to chew *khat*, a leafy stimulant. This was stopped. Many trappings of modern Western culture were also prohibited. According to one Somali journalist named "Ali," during the occupation, "There was no music. No cinema. Even they banned local TV. When there were local songs, they were banned. All of that they banned."[103]

To enforce its new code of conduct, IS–Somalia tended to resort to the intimidation of those under its control rather than the kind of violent punishment and coercion used in Derna and Sirte in Libya. Rather than being killed, those who disobeyed the IS–Somalia's rule were more typically jailed or physically punished. A 35-year-old housewife named "Hawa,"[104] who stayed in Qandala during the occupation, remembers her first encounter with the occupying forces:

> My first interaction with the Islamic State happened when they have been staying in our town for five days only. I went out to buy food from a shop in my neighborhood. I was wearing my normal Somali dress. Two men from the Islamic State approached me as soon as I came out of the shop and called me. They asked me, "Why was I not covering my whole body with *hijab*?" I told them that my body was properly covered. They harassed me and told me

> that they will punish me next time if I come out of my house without *hijab*. I was not feeling comfortable as they started to walk away. I was worrying all the way to my house.[105]

"Hawa" continued:

> [The Islamic State's] interaction with me from that day has instilled fear in myself because it was the first time that I felt panic. I also started to worry about the safety of my family as well. Then, I decided to leave the town with my family and since I had close relatives [nearby]. I resettled with them in Bosaso one week after the interaction between me and [the Islamic State] occurred. I never returned back to Qandala.[106]

Particularly liable to punishment were those citizens remaining in Qandala who did not show the appropriate degree of piety, especially if they did not pray on time. As "Hawa" recalled:

> There are countless times that I have heard about people that [the Islamic State] has arrested or punished for doing small things that they were not happy with. A close relative of mine was arrested after he [was] caught working in his shop during prayer time. He [was] held for 24 hours and then [the Islamic State] fined him for about US$100 and humiliated him. That was one of the incidents that has forced me to reach the decision to leave the town with my family.[107]

And indeed, the Islamic State's application of its new code of conduct even extended to those from outside the city. As one fisherman, "Farah," who stayed in Qandala during the occupation, recalled:

> One occasion that is still vivid in my mind was one Friday when all adult male Muslims should attend the Friday prayer. Just before the Friday prayer was to commence, there was a man from a rural area who travelled [a] long distance and [who did] not know even where the mosques [in town] were. He was looking for something to eat, and suddenly he encountered one of the [IS] fighters. [The fighter] asked why he was not going to mosque instead of moving

> around. The poor man from the rural area was aggressive enough to defend himself, telling [the IS fighter] that travelers are not obliged to pray in gatherings. There was a hot debate between them, which later forced the Islamic State fighter to call another fighter, and the man from the rural area was taken into jail. I cannot remember the exact date but it was about one or two days after [the Islamic State] invade[d] the town.[108]

Despite the well-documented punishments and intimidation undertaken by the IS–Somalia, less clarity exists about its culpability for killings. To date, no reports have emerged definitively showing that the IS–Somalia killed anyone during its occupation in Qandala, a narrative that most[109]—though not all[110]—agree with.

Beyond attempting to impose its version of sharia law through intimidation, the Islamic State took initial steps at institutionalizing its rule as a proto-state. To fund its activities, it soon started taxing and collecting money from ordinary citizens[111] and from business,[112] and even from the theft of cattle.[113] "Hawa" recalled that the Islamic State set up roadblocks on roads entering and leaving Qandala, forcing travelers to pay entry and exit fees.[114] For his part, "Farah" described the sense of inquietude that characterized his experience:

> Soon [after the Islamic State] invaded the city, we worried a lot of what would happen next. Could there be fighting between the Puntland forces and the Islamic State? Could there be a war between the Islamic State and al-Shabaab? We were totally confused and were anticipating that anything can happen. The next day, they ordered all fishermen to stop fishing. [We fishermen] were extremely surprised and worried [about] our business and income for our families. [The Islamic State was] very suspicious of fishermen because the fishermen may [travel] far [into] the ocean where other European and US warships stay.[115]

While the Islamic State's takeover was not a complete surprise—IS Somalia's leader, Mumin, was from Qandala, and many citizens of Qandala knew IS militants from the broader district—a sense of worry and fear nevertheless took hold among locals. Beyond the uncertainty, many

expressed surprise and annoyance about the specific interpretation of Islamic law that the group tried to implement, which differed significantly from local norms.[116] In a notable tiff, locals expressed anger that the Islamic State had destroyed villages and date trees that had existed for generations.[117] As "Farah" remarked: "Most [people in Qandala] dislike[d] them, because as soon they invaded, they changed the way people used to live, and their beliefs of religion."[118]

While a significant portion of the citizens of Qandala left within days, one man refused. Seventy-six-year-old Mohamud Yasin Yusuf would not abandon his hometown, deciding to stay in Qandala to protect what he viewed as the town's most precious treasure: the Italian-constructed fish-processing plant on the edge of town. He decided to hide out in the fish factory. "I didn't want to leave the town," Yusuf told reporter Harun Maruf in 2016. "I never left [Qandala] for one night."[119] Yusuf, who started working at the fish-processing plant as a dishwasher as a teenager in the 1950s when it was owned by Italians, eventually became the general manager. Even while Somalia declined into lawlessness in the 1990s, Yusuf continued to maintain the fish factory, even after it closed in 1993, two years after the collapse of the Somali state. As a resident of Qandala during the Islamic State's occupation, Yusuf recalled that the day IS fighters found him in the plant, they questioned him and took pictures of him, and then left. "People are scared of them, but they did not cause any problems for me," he said. Worried for his safety, relatives eventually persuaded Yusuf to allow himself to be smuggled out of Qandala by boat in secrecy of the night of November 23, 2016, nearly one month after the Islamic State's occupation began.[120]

While Yusuf was holding down the fish factory, the response from the international community was slow. The government of Puntland declared war on IS–Somalia in early November 2016, though took little action against the group. It was only in late November 2016 that a counter-offensive to dislodge the militants from Qandala began in earnest. With permission from elders from the Majeerteen/Ali Saleeban clans that dominated Qandala,[121] who had become annoyed at their co-ethnic Mumin's heavy-handed approach to governance there[122]—and who had begun negotiations to allow a counter-offensive[123]—forces from Puntland, comprising the local government, regional soldiers, and informal clan-based

militias, and backed by international community assistance, launched an assault.

The first battle occurred some fifty kilometers from the city itself, in the village of Bashashin. There, on December 3, 2016, as trucks from the regional government moved across a narrow road, they encountered landmines left by members of the IS–Somalia. While stopping to deactivate them so that their vehicles could pass, members of the counter-offensive team began taking on enemy fire. Eventually, three of their soldiers were wounded, though they killed seven IS militants.[124]

While ground forces marched towards Qandala, others prepared to counter the occupiers amphibiously. Puntland security forces created a blockade to ensure that IS militants could not receive provisions from their allies just across the Red Sea in Yemen.[125] On December 3,[126] forces entered Qandala by sea, taking the headquarters of the district commissioner, built by the Italians, as well as staking out a position in the fish factory by December 7.[127] The United States, which has been deeply involved in fighting al-Shabaab further to the south, offered advisors (and perhaps more) to help Somali troops.[128] Others have noted the presence of NATO warships off the coast of Qandala.[129]

In total, the counter-offensive lasted approximately a week, with local Puntland forces and US advisors engaging in armed combat with members of the group. Estimates suggest that during these counterattacks, the IS–Somalia lost around thirty fighters,[130] or around half of its estimated forces at the time. By December 7, IS–Somalia fled from the town of Qandala,[131] retreating into the Bin Ja'ael Valley and its mountainous environs.[132] Later during the day of its expulsion, members of nearby villages reported that around twenty Islamic State members fled to them, seeking refuge and asking residents for food and water.[133] In total, an estimated 27,500 citizens were displaced during the Islamic State's nearly seven-week occupation of Qandala.[134]

The Islamic State's foray into holding territory in Somalia was somewhat brief—lasting just under two months—but it constituted the first time the group had done so in Somalia and, more importantly, in East Africa more broadly. The incident also exposed the complexities of conducting

counterterrorism operations against local IS affiliates that had emerged from and were embedded within the local communities they sought to rule.

In retrospect, to what degree was IS Central involved in the takeover of Qandala? To be sure, the occupation was an attempt to repeat what IS Central had done elsewhere in the Middle East: like the occupation of Mosul, the siege of Qandala saw a group of soldiers besiege the town, raising the Black Standard, and beginning to institute sharia. Yet, while the takeover mimicked in style and substance some of the Islamic State's takeovers in Iraq and Syria, there is little evidence to suggest that IS Central was aware of the occupation, or that it necessarily supported it, particularly because, at the time, Mumin's group had only been recognized as existing by IS Central, not constituting one of its official *wilayat*. Indeed, no evidence to date has suggested that any connection in terms of guidance, tactical advice, or funding existed between the two. Instead, we suggest, the takeover can be thought of as Mumin's attempt to demonstrate to IS Central the very point that his group was deserving of elevation to an official IS *wilaya*. Perhaps like the Gourdel killing in Algeria, or the attempt to overrun Ben Guerdane in Tunisia, this may well be interpreted as the Somalia militants' attempt at affiliate utility validation. The siege, though somewhat short-lived, may have accomplished just that end.

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Life within the Islamic State in Somalia

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Northern Somalia
2016–2017

While Mumin's group was attempting to solidify its reputation for IS Central, for one man, "Abdi," the incipient IS affiliate cell served as an escape route. "Abdi" had joined al-Shabaab in 2010, but by 2014 he sought to leave the group. The problem remained, however, that those members who wanted to defect were often targeted by al-Shabaab. As "Abdi" described it:

> [At a certain point] I realized that I cannot live within the al-Shabaab area. So, I went from the al-Shabaab areas. I wasn't ready to surrender myself to the government, because al-Shabaab has informers, even within the government. I heard some members ran away and ran to some rogue government officials and they wanted to defect, and they were killed. Al-Shabaab killed some defectors in Mogadishu. I wasn't ready to defect. I went to Mogadishu, but I couldn't stay as there were so many assassinations. I managed to reach Galkayo and when I reached there, there were already al-Shabaab assassinations happening there already, so I could not stay there for a long time. So, I called a relative who was close to the border between Ethiopia and Somalia. I wanted to go there … but when I called the relative, he said [I could not] come here: they report[ed] new people [arriving to town] and you might be interrogated by the Ethiopians. I was in a difficult situation. So, I tried to get access to where Abdulqadir Mumin was in Puntland.[135]

"Abdi" was in a no-win situation: he wanted to leave al-Shabaab, but - defecting to the government remained impossible. His solution was to join IS–Somalia.

While "Abdi" was not necessarily recruited, his story is, to a degree, emblematic of the broader trend of how many people joined IS–Somalia: after defecting from al-Shabaab. According to another former defector, when Mumin first formed the cell in 2015, only approximately 20 of the 300 fighters of the al-Shabaab cell based in Puntland defected with him.[136] The UN estimated that at its inception Mumin's group numbered only a "few dozen."[137] However, over time, Mumin began actively recruiting others to join IS–Somalia throughout the Puntland region. In June 2017, Matt Bryden estimated that IS–Somalia had 200 to 300 fighters in its Puntland cell,[138] while a year later, in mid-2018, others thought there were approximately 150 fighters.[139]

Mumin also succeeded in ensuring that IS–Somalia was predominantly, though not exclusively,[140] composed of members of his own Ali Saleeban subclan, which predominates in much of the Bari region.[141] Even one year after his original pledge to al-Baghdadi in October 2015, the majority of Mumin's support—both fighters and logistical support—appeared to come

from co-ethnic Ali Saleeban. While some joined for ideological reasons, local men and boys from the region also joined simply to receive a salary,[142] to seek revenge on other clans,[143] or in a broader drive for money and power.[144]

The limited base—confined to Mumin's own clansmen—led him, unsuccessfully, to try to branch out. And when they failed to attract many new recruits, the group began kidnapping boys. As the US State Department has noted, Mumin's IS cell has "expanded his cell of ISIL supporters by kidnapping young boys aged 10 to 15, indoctrinating them, and forcing them to take up militant activity."[145] As "Abdi" described it in late 2018:

> Now their recruiting force is … men from the rural areas. They go to the cattle hereders and they promise them a phone and tell them they will travel for the first time in different areas of Somalia. They convince nomad guys to follow them. Now the recruiting force is only the nomads. Not many from the cities even. They also collect children, persuade their children that they want to educate them.[146]

For those who elected to join the Islamic State from places outside Puntland, there was a network of IS–Somalia handlers for new recruits. Embedded in the group's *amniyat* security and intelligence service (not to be confused with al-Shabaab's own Amniyat) were facilitators who prepared the requisite paperwork for entry into the country, greeted newcomers at airports, and facilitated their movement to IS Somalia's training camp.[147] The United Nations, for instance, interviewed two former IS–Somalia fighters in 2017, who stated that the organization had sent them plane tickets, allowing them to fly from Mogadishu to Galkayo, the capital of the Mudug region, thus allowing them to bypass roadblocks on the long journey from southern to northern Somalia.[148]

Just what was life like inside IS–Somalia? According to "Abdi," it was "hard." Because the fighters were constantly on the move to avoid detection, there were no permanent shelters. "No homes. We were constantly moving. We slept on the floor. No tents, no mattresses. Nothing like that," he said.[149] Scarcity of water was also a constant problem, as was procurement of food. Given that the fighters were living in isolation, they could only buy food from small villages and from nomads.[150]

However, as "Abdi" maintains, there was a strong desire to emphasize the group's presumed connections with IS Central in everyday life, even if the actual links were limited: "[The guys in IS–Somalia] are really isolated. But they want to confuse their members and show that they are connected to [IS Central]. Their only connection is to download propaganda videos to show their soldiers."

> Though the internet in Puntland is poor, one or two people would download these [IS Central] videos and then show them to others. They would put them on memory cards and distribute the videos … Sometimes the videos would show fighting. Sometimes they would show administrative tasks: people tackling social issues like managing markets and collecting *zakat* or distributing aid and assisting normal people. When you see good things like distributing to the poor, you think these guys are doing good things. It boosts the morale of the members.[151]

In addition to distributing propaganda, IS in Somalia also sought to improve its capacity for violence. Centered primarily in the Golis mountains, the Islamic State appears to have a small training camp in Puntland, which it opened in April 2016.[152] The camp was named after a former al-Shabaab training commander, Bashir Abu Numan, who had defected to IS–Somalia but who was then killed by al-Shabaab's Amniyat security services in November 2015. The temporary camp was announced in an IS video that was aired on April 14, 2016, with Mumin hailing it as "the first camp of the Caliphate in Somalia."[153] The video shows the spartan nature of the "camp," which consisted of little more than a barren plain with a white, hand-scrawled cloth banner reading "Military Camp of [Sheikh] Abu Numan, the Mujahid commander, may God accept him: [The] first martyr of the Caliphate in Somalia."[154]

Organizationally, the Islamic State, in "Abid's" experience, was in disarray: "There was no administration. No management. It was a complete mess. There was infighting. They would also arrest guys among themselves. They kept them in caves."[155]

Were there any good time for "Abdi"? "Yes, there were times we enjoyed some soccer, but not a lot. In the first year maybe. After that it was

difficult. There were IS members who believed that anyone who plays soccer is an apostate."[156]

The lifestyle of the Islamic State in Somalia also took a visible toll on Mumin, whom "Abdi" met in late 2016, before the siege of Qandala:

> I met Mumin once. At that time there were [a] very small [number of fighters]: 50 or 60 or 70. In groups of eight, nine, ten. I once met with Mumin. It was a few days before they attacked Qandala … He was emaciated. Very thin. Healthwise not fit. The area was highly mountainous with [a] scarcity of water, hardships of walking on foot for long distances, but when you are old and in this situation, you can imagine. He was old. Not very healthy … Since IS were not established like al-Shabaab, they had no laboratory, no means of analysis. Mumin had a slightly raised blood pressure someone, told me. He thought he had Type 2 diabetes.[157]

Indeed, the harsh terrain and lifestyles of the IS–Somalia have had a deleterious impact on the group's ability to recruit foreign fighters. Even getting to its area of operation in the Cal Miskaad mountains is difficult. Once there, conditions were stark. IS Somalia's weapons were generally outdated[158] and its fighters are relatively poorly paid: while a married fighter might make approximately $50 a month with a $10 to $20 bonus per child, not all were so lucky. Unmarried fighters were thought to earn no salary at all.[159] As the Hiraal Institute noted bluntly about the lack of foreign fighters in IS–Somalia: "There are more appealing destinations than Puntland [Somalia] for the survivors of the war in Iraq and Syria."[160]

Despite these challenges, IS–Somalia increasingly showed itself to be a group composed of more than just Somali nationals. Initially, some of the group's most senior foreign fighters came from Sudan, while other defectors mention the presence of Kenyans, Djiboutians,[161] Ethiopians,[162] Yemenis, and at least one Kuwaiti[163] in the ranks as foreign fighters,[164] even though some are likely of Somali ethnicity. Members of the Somali diaspora both in the West (the United Kingdom,[165] Canada, Norway, and the Netherlands) and in Africa (especially Kenya but also Sudan) have also reportedly joined the group.[166] And, indeed, by late 2018, observers noted that a new mini-wave of IS foreign fighters seemed to be moving into

northern Somalia. Led by a Syrian, the new cadre included Kenyans, Sudanese, Libyans, and, perhaps most interestingly, two Pakistanis. [167]

Further complicating its recruitment efforts is Somalia's reputation for being an unwelcoming place for foreign fighters more generally. As can be seen from al-Qaeda's attempts to create satellite spaces in Somalia in the early 1990s, establishing a foreign presence in Somali jihadi circles is difficult. In addition to the fact that Somalis do not primarily speak Arabic, letters between leaders within al-Qaeda revealed that the group found its foreign fighters were "prone to extortion and betrayal [by Somalis], found themselves trapped in the middle of incomprehensible (to them) [Somali] clan conflicts, [and] faced suspicion from the indigenous population."[168] For example, despite fighting for al-Shabaab for up to seven years, when rumors predicting an IS insurgent wing within the group began to emerge, foreign fighters in al-Shabaab became the primary suspected parties. One foreign fighter expressed the depth of division, stating: "Some [foreign] mujahideen fighters are now preferring to fall into the enemy's hands [the Somali government or AMISOM] instead of meeting death in the hands of brothers [of al-Shabaab]."[169]

How did the IS–Somalia fund itself? Like other Islamic State cells throughout Africa, the group relied on a combination of extortion and taxation. The most commonly noted means of generating revenue was the taxation of businessmen by means of intimidation, in much the same way as al-Shabaab. One citizen told investigative reporter Harun Maruf, "Businesses are paying three taxes today, al-Shabaab taxes, Daesh [IS] taxes, and the normal government taxes."[170] As noted previously, the IS–Somalia has also reportedly received finances from nearby Yemen,[171] and is assumed to be involved in smuggling activities.

Following the fall of Qandala, how did IS–Somalia's profile of violence progress? While the siege of Qandala remains its largest attack, it was not its first. Instead, the first claimed attack in Somalia was an alleged IED explosion on April 25, 2016, outside Mogadishu near KM13, targeting an African Union vehicle.[172] However, AMISOM forces denied that such an attack ever took place.[173] With veracity of the first claim at question, IS Somalia's second attack would become a hallmark of its subsequent series of violent actions. Beginning in early 2016 and continuing until al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019, IS–Somalia carried out a series of

assassinations of Somali police, military, and other representatives of local or national governments. Its first assassination of a government representative took place on May 5, 2016, when it attacked members of the Somali National Army (SNA), also in Mogadishu,[174] though there is some debate about whether anyone was killed.[175] Over the coming years, IS–Somalia would use various means—hand grenades, assaults, and assassinations—to target and kill members of the SNA, members of the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), and local police and military, government, and tax officials around the country, especially in Mogadishu, Bosaso, and Afgooye. In sum, these attacks on official representatives represented, as of March 2020, roughly 95 percent of IS–Somalia's violent actions.[176]

Besides these attacks, there have been a few notable deviations in IS–Somalia's pattern of violence. In an episode showing all the trappings of an IS affiliate, IS–Somalia beheaded three Puntland soldiers in January 2017.[177] There was a further development when it deployed its first (and, by the time of al-Baghdadi's death, only) suicide bomber on May 23, 2017.[178] On that date, a suicide bomber detonated himself near the Juba hotel, also in Bosaso, killing five people and injuring twelve others.[179] Besides the incursion in Qandala (when no civilians were killed), Caleb Weiss has noted only one other instance in which the IS–Somalia has attacked civilians: on January 23, 2019, four Christians were killed in Bosaso.[180] From its inception to al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019, the IS–Somalia claimed—though not necessarily carried out[181]—a total of 161 attacks,[182] a figure which, though not insignificant, pales in comparison with the violence of larger IS groups in Africa, like IS-West Africa Province and IS–Libya.

Even more lackluster was its record of attempted governance. By the time of al-Baghdadi's death, besides the brief occupation of Qandala, there is no evidence of IS–Somalia's attempts to "govern," if we except the presence of a Canadian foreign fighter doctor, who was shown examining civilians in a January 2019 video.[183] This lack of attempt at governance was likely due to the fact that the only area it could claim to "occupy" was a small, mostly mountainous and isolated stretch in the Golis mountains, uninhabited by other civilians.

Eventually, "Abdi" defected from IS–Somalia just as he had done with al-Shabaab.

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PART THREE
THE POST-BAYAH PERIOD

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A Province, Belatedly

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Somalia
2015–2018

Between 2015 and 2017, to what extent did Mumin's IS fighters have a relationship with IS Central? Since the rise of IS–Somalia, authorities have expressed various opinions regarding the extent of cooperation between the two. The most visible connection appears to be through the media space. Though the Islamic State has a regional media bureau located in Somalia,[184] the lack of output raised questions about the true degree of affiliation. Materially, beyond the initial transfers of funding between Mumin's upstart cell and IS Central in late 2015 and early 2016, defectors from IS–Somalia in December 2016, after the fall of Qandala, revealed that it received both operational orders and funding through *hawala* transfers[185] from IS Central, then based in Iraq and Syria. Moreover, there is evidence that Mumin communicated with IS Central leadership in Iraq and Syria through voice recordings on encrypted networks such as TrueCrypt.[186] A UN report in 2018 asserted that Mumin was in direct contact with Somali-Syrian citizens in Syria, who were considering moving to join IS–Somalia.[187] While most observers agree that, besides the above, there is little evidence of profound and sustained cooperation between IS Central and IS–Somalia,[188] the latter, at least in the early days, did appear to have at least some connection with the former.

Questions about the relations between the two were laid to rest in December 2017 when IS Central released, through its official Telegram channel, its first video seemingly elevating IS–Somalia to *wilaya* status. However, this video was peculiar in that the Islamic State assiduously avoided referring to Somalia as a *wilaya* throughout, instead calling it "Somalia," except at the very end. That reference, most observers agree, was just a typo.[189]

In the video, which appeared on December 25, 2017, the Islamic State called for the continued pursuit of global jihad, urging its supporters to take advantage of Christians' "drunkenness" over the holiday season to attack the non-believers.[190] Moreover, the video called for the Islamic State's lone wolves to conduct attacks during Christmas—targeting churches and markets—and New Year's Eve—targeting clubs[191]—while also showing pictures of Pope Francis and Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, archbishop of New York, in the crosshairs of a presumed IS gun scope.[192] The video concluded with the appearance of three members of IS–Somalia, at least two from Ethiopia, urging people on to global jihad.[193]

The question whether Somalia had or had not been elevated to a *wilaya* continued through mid-2018. Again, in an article in its *Al-Naba* weekly newsletter in July 2018, IS Central used conflicting terminology to describe the status of the group in Somalia, sometimes referring to it as a *wilaya* and sometimes not.[194] And, though the group existed in a liminal provincial status from December 2017 to mid-2018, Mumin achieved affiliate utility validation by August 2018, as his group began to be consistently called an official IS *wilaya*.

Despite this elevation, the connections between IS Central and IS–Somalia were far from robust. A sovereign subordinate through and through, even in the media realm—the most common space in which African IS provinces were shown to demonstrate connections with the parent body—IS–Somalia showed little signs of connection. For instance, by mid-2018, the Hiraal Institute noted that IS–Somalia was "disconnected from the rest of the Islamic State, apart from its media operatives,"[195] and Christopher Anzalone has noted that in so far as IS Central disseminated IS–Somalia propaganda at all (in organs such as *Al-Furat* and the Amaq news agency), they "remained limited in frequency and num-ber."[196] One

report by Daniel Milton suggests that IS–Somalia produced just five IS-branded visual media products in 2017, with even fewer in prior years.[197]

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Southward, Deadlier, into Conflict

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Somalia
2017–2019

As 2017 and 2018 progressed, IS–Somalia showed a tendency to move southward in the country, into al-Shabaab's historical areas of operation, as the feud between the two continued to rage. In late 2017, after more than a year of simmering tensions between them, al-Shabaab succeeded in getting one of its most respected ideologues and emir of its Kenyan foreign fighters, a Kenyan preacher named Ahmad Iman Ali, to issue a *fatwa* on anyone who opposed the organization. This *fatwa*, combined with al-Shabaab's crackdown on dissidents in southern Somalia in late 2015, the Islamic State's steady attrition in Iraq and Syria, and IS–Somalia's generally small presence, seems to have largely headed off any would-be challenge that the Islamic State might have presented to al-Shabaab as the pre-eminent jihadi group in Somalia. So confident was al-Shabaab in its position that, in southern Somalia, it began releasing all foreign fighters who had been arrested by its internal security and intelligence wing, the Amniyat, on suspicion of having sympathies for or even being members of the Islamic State. On condition that they forgo any leadership role within the Islamic State, al-Shabaab allowed those released to live with their families in al-Shabaab-controlled areas, as a pragmatic move to "quiet … disaffection among foreign members … and free up space in [al-Shabaab's] prisons."[198]

Yet IS–Somalia had no intention of fully yielding the spotlight. From Mumin's territory in the Puntland region of northern Somalia, which was relatively secure, IS–Somalia began to send its fighters into southern Somalia, which had historically been al-Shabaab's area of operation. In late 2017, it managed to establish a presence in Afgooye, only twenty

kilometers from Mogadishu, and from there it expanded to other towns on the outskirts of Mogadishu, including Elasha Biyaha on the road from Afgooye to the capital. By summer 2018, it had established a durable presence in the Bakaara neighborhood of the capital itself.[199] Having secured a foothold, IS–Somalia then embarked on a sustained campaign of assassinations in southern Somalia, primarily targeting Somali federal government employees.[200] By the end of 2018, IS media claimed 39 attacks in Mogadishu alone, 58 percent of the total attacks claimed by official IS channels, thereby showing a major shift in IS–Somalia's focus, with attacks in Mogadishu far outnumbering those in Afgooye or even Puntland, the group's core territory.

Though it appeared that al-Shabab had begun to feel confident that it faced no real threat from IS-Somalia,[201] the latter's expansion into southern Somalia in late 2017 and 2018—an area where al-Shabaab had so thoroughly removed IS–Somalia during its attempt to recruit defectors in late 2015 and early 2016—provoked a severe response. Al-Shabaab's deep unease first became apparent in October 2018 with its publicized execution of IS–Somalia personnel and its denunciation of them as agents of Western intelligence agencies.[202] The war of words escalated again in mid-November 2018 when Islamic State's weekly *Al-Naba* newsletter published a surprising threat. Al-Shabaab, it warned, should watch out: the group's incessant targeting and execution of IS–Somalia members had crossed a line. The article described al-Shabaab's campaign as "provocative," and accused it of torturing and executing IS–Somalia prisoners. Going even further, it said that the Islamic State would begin attacking al-Shabaab if it continued in this way.[203]

IS–Somalia made good on its threats to launch a counter-offensive against al-Shabaab when, on December 16, 2018, it ambushed al-Shabaab members southwest of Qandala. It claimed it had killed fourteen fighters and released footage of the incident through IS's Amaq outlet. The attack constituted the first direct assault by IS–Somalia on al-Shabaab in its year-long campaign.[204] Al-Shabaab's response came days later, on December 20. The organization's spokesman, Ali Mohamud Rage, effectively declared war on IS–Somalia, saying: "the leadership … orders all the mujahideen in … [all areas in Somalia] to strongly oppose the prevalence of the disease

[the Islamic State] in the Jihad."[205] Most notably, al-Shabaab killed IS–Somalia's deputy, Mahmat Moalim, in Mogadishu on October 13, 2018.[206]

Al-Shabaab's campaign failed, however, to seriously impede IS–Somalia in carrying out attacks in those areas of central and southern Somalia where al-Shabaab had been dominant, and the pace of IS–Somalia's attacks hardly slowed through the first half of 2019.[207] It appeared that al-Shabaab's fears of IS–Somalia's growing prominence in southern Somalia were well founded: it had established small but effective "cells" between Mogadishu and Afgooye,[208] which were able to weather al-Shabaab's attempts to destroy them, even if the group itself remained unable to contest al-Shabaab's dominance in those same areas.

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The Islamic State in Somalia at the Time of al-Baghdadi's Death

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Somalia
October 2019

By the time of al-Baghdadi's death in October 2019, IS–Somalia had shown itself to be a group on the rise, with an expanding presence in southern Somalia, an increasing presence in IS Central's media operations, recognition as an official *wilaya*, and a willingness to fight back against the much stronger and more entrenched al-Qaeda branch, al-Shabaab. By October 2019, IS–Somalia had claimed—though not definitively conducted—161 attacks since the very first in 2016.[209]

The story of IS–Somalia echoes that of many of the IS provinces throughout the continent. In Somalia—an unstable, poor state with a substantial al-Qaeda presence—the Islamic State's global emergence democratized jihad, allowing an ambitious but disaffected jihadi ideologue, Abdulqadir Mumin, to break away from his al-Qaeda cell in Puntland and, with members of his Ali Saleeban sub-clan, attempt to form an IS–Somalia branch. For Mumin, achieving affiliate utility validation proved difficult: it would take nearly thirty-four months—nearly three years—from the time of

his pledge for his group to be consistently referred to as an IS *wilaya*. And, even once it became an official *wilaya* of the Islamic State, evidence suggests that it received little more than occasional direction or assistance from IS Central. Instead, as with many other IS cells, IS–Somalia was a sovereign subordinate of IS Central, conducting its own day-to-day operations (including expanding southward, targeting members of the Somali government, and fighting with al-Shabaab) with limited demonstrable interaction with the parent body beyond appearances in its media. Perhaps uniquely, despite undertaking the killing of police and military, IS–Somalia remained more restrained than other IS affiliates in Africa, rarely governing or punishing citizens, and only rarely attacking civilians. Following al-Baghdadi's death, like almost all other African *wilayat*, IS–Somalia reaffirmed its pledge to the Islamic State, issuing its reaffirmation on November 7, 2019.

In mid-2019 one notable interaction with IS Central came to light. In July of that year, evidence emerged showing that IS Central had recently tasked IS–Somalia with an important role: serving as its regional hub for East Africa. A report by the United Nations noted that, according to intelligence from a member state, "ISIL in Somalia was directed by the [IS] core to oversee financing for its affiliates and, in one case, had directed funds to support operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo."[210] Another report from January 2020 echoed that conclusion. It is to that affiliate, the newest branch of the Islamic State, its Central Africa Province, that we now turn.

9

THE ISLAMIC STATE'S CENTRAL AFRICA PROVINCE—DRC

PART ONE
THE PRE-BAYAH PERIOD

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Escaping Medina

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Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo
January–August 2014

On January 17, 2014, the military of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC), launched a major offensive in the country's Beni territory, near the border with Uganda. Over the course of several months, thousands of Congolese soldiers embarked on the operation, named Sukola I, meaning "mop up" in the Lingala language. Venturing out from the country's N4 highway running south to north, soldiers secured the thin, isolated roads that snaked through the dense forests of Virunga National Park towards the

Ugandan border. The FARDC then penetrated the bush in pursuit of one of Congo's most secretive militias, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), ultimately seizing its primary headquarters, which the ADF referred to as Madina. The operation proved immensely bloody, costing the lives of 217 FARDC soldiers and wounding 416 more by May 2014.[1] Nonetheless, the operation was hailed as a success, scattering the ADF and forcing its leader, Jamil Mukulu, to flee DRC entirely.

The vast majority of the ADF, numbering some 1,200—including fighters, family members and other civilians—were not nearly so fortunate. Placed under the leadership of Mukulu's deputy, Musa Baluku, in April 2014 after Mukulu fled the country, the ADF was chased by the Congolese military in a running battle over the next several months, leading to the deaths of the large majority of ADF personnel through battlefield losses and starvation. As the ADF split into multiple, smaller groups to more easily evade the Congolese military in the thick jungle terrain, the breakdown in communications between the cells made it virtually impossible for the ADF's network of civilian supporters to deliver food and medical supplies to the fighters. Sick and starving members of the ADF's splinter cells were often left behind, and by August 2014 the core ADF group led by Baluku had been reduced to no more than 200 individuals, less than half of whom were fighters or commanders.[2]

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The Origins of the Allied Democratic Forces

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Kampala, Uganda
1980–1995

The origins of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) lie in the early 1990s in Kampala, Uganda, in a dissident movement critical of Uganda's official, state-approved Muslim organization, the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council (UMSC). As was the case throughout much of East Africa, including Mozam-bique (chapter 10), the UMSC had been established in 1972—soon after the dictator Idi Amin's rise to power—to serve as a single,

government-recognized civil society organization for Uganda's Muslim minority,[3] which composed approximately 11.5 percent of the population overall.[4] Many of the UMSC's early leaders were pliant, inexperienced military officials, and the UMSC largely acted as an arm of Amin's regime. After Amin's overthrow in 1979, more established clerics attempted to assert control, but the UMSC quickly became paralyzed as rival camps within Uganda's Muslim community fought over which faction would take control. The traditional clerical establishment, in which Sufis were prominent, faced a major challenge from a younger generation of Salafists returning from their studies in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, South Asia and elsewhere in the Muslim world in the early 1980s.[5] This did not improve after the assumption of power by President Yoweri Museveni in early 1986. Leadership of the UMSC was contested by a pro-government, often Sufi traditional establishment and a younger Salafist reformist movement seeking to wrest control. An election in 1987 for leadership of the UMSC was hard fought, resulting in four years of institutional standstill in which the UMSC's general assembly rarely met.[6]

Among this younger Salafist generation of Ugandan Muslims was Jamil Mukulu, a Muslim convert who had studied in Saudi Arabia before returning home, where he quickly became an influential figure in the Tabligh movement by 1991.[7] This movement had begun in northern India in the 1920s, spreading across much of the Muslim world; it emphasized a populist, even egalitarian approach toward revitalizing Islam at the individual level.[8] Distinct from Salafism, the Tabligh movement nonetheless had similar views on correcting "impure" Islamic practices, and the Salafists and Tablighs in Uganda became a closely intertwined opposition to the clerical establishment in the intergenerational struggle over control of the UMSC.[9]

By March 1991, these USMC disputes had reached boiling point. Following a hotly contested election for the title of *mufti* (a Muslim legal expert who is empowered to give rulings on religious matters) of Uganda, a court handed the position to the pro-Museveni candidate favored by the UMSC's leadership, but whom the Tablighs and Salafists dismissed for not possessing the requisite academic credentials outlined by the UMSC's constitution.[10] In response, as many as a thousand Tabligh activists led by Jamil Mukulu stormed and occupied the UMSC's offices at the Old

Kampala Mosque.[11] Riot police were sent in to disperse the occupation, killing one protestor. In the resulting riot four policemen were killed and Mukulu and 434 of his followers were arrested.[12]

While much of the broader Tabligh movement reversed course in the aftermath of the clashes by seeking a more conciliatory relationship with both the UMSC and the Ugandan government, Mukulu's own views only hardened in prison. Denouncing the moderation of his former colleagues—who renounced violence and worked to establish the Salafi movement as a religious institution on its own rather than competing for leadership of the UMSC—Mukulu instead formed his own group called the Salafi Foundation upon his release in 1993.[13] Quickly clashing with not only the clerical establishment but also his former colleagues within the Tabligh movement, Mukulu as well as his followers decamped from Kampala to Hoima in western Uganda in 1994.

In a first iteration of the armed group that would eventually become the ADF, Mukulu established the Uganda Muslim Freedom Fighters (UMFF) in 1994 as the Salafi Foundation's military wing. Choosing to challenge the Ugandan government militarily rather than compete for authority within the government-recognized Islamic clerical authority,[14] this upstart cell quickly came to the attention of Ugandan security forces as it prepared itself for an insurgency in the remote forests of Hoima district, some 200 kilometers west of Kampala. On February 25, 1995, the Ugandan military attacked the UMFF's camps and quickly routed the group, killing more than 93 members.[15] In response, Mukulu and several dozen[16] followers fled Uganda into the security vacuum of neighboring Zaire,[17] which, under the crumbling regime of Mobutu Sese Seko, was an ideal haven for a struggling rebel group.

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The ADF in the Congolese Context

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Beni, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo
1995–2003

Having come to power in Congo in 1965, which he renamed Zaire in 1971, President Mobutu presided over a long decline in the administrative and security capacity of the Zairean state, overseeing an administration that can only be described as one of recent history's greatest kleptocracies.[18] By the early 1990s, Zaire's economy had collapsed, the Cold War-era support he had enjoyed from the United States as a bulwark against communism in Central Africa had dried up, and Mobutu agreed to multi-party elections. In this situation, Mobutu resorted to backing rebel groups from neighboring countries with the dual goal of keeping external enemies off balance while internally stoking ethnic tensions to play his own potential political rivals off one another.

With Mobutu looking to back foreign rebel groups, the vacuum of power in eastern Zaire in the early 1990s became a haven for Mukulu and other Ugandan rebel movements fleeing Museveni's crackdowns. This same vacuum in eastern Zaire also proved a haven for millions of Rwandan Hutu refugees who flowed into the country in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide in summer 1994. Fleeing the Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels that had seized power as the Hutu extremist government disintegrated,[19] millions of Rwandan Hutu refugees came to reside in massive refugee camps in Zaire's North and South Kivu provinces. The camps were ruled by the remnants of the Hutu army and extremist militias that had perpetrated the genocide against Rwanda's Tutsis. These same Hutu figures had also directed the refugees into Zaire as the Tutsi RPF took control of Rwanda. With these exiled Hutu former soldiers and militia who ruled the camps in Zaire quickly beginning to conduct cross-border raids into Rwanda against the RPF, the new Tutsi-dominated government finally invaded eastern Zaire in October 1996. Allied with Museveni's Uganda, it established and supported a Congolese proxy army—the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaïre, or AFDL)—to legitimize its invasion of Zaire. Headed by an exiled Congolese rebel named Laurent-Désiré Kabila, the AFDL and its Rwandan and Ugandan backers found Mobutu's rule so fragile that they not only cleared the Hutu Rwandan refugee camps near the eastern border with Rwanda and Uganda, but continued further and pushed west toward Zaire's capital, Kinshasa, quickly posing the greatest threat to Mobutu's hold on power since the 1970s.

Recognizing the weakness of his control in eastern Zaire (and outmatched by the prowess of Rwanda, Uganda and their Congolese allies), Mobutu cultivated relationships with several exiled Ugandan groups who had found sanctuary in Zaire's Beni territory just after Museveni's rise to power. In conjunction with Omar al-Bashir's government of Sudan, which opposed Uganda for its own reasons,[20] Mobutu backed the merger of these Ugandan rebels into a proxy army that he could use to push back against Uganda. Mukulu and his followers, having arrived in Beni only a year before, thus joined another exiled Ugandan rebel group, the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU),[21] to form the Allied Democratic Forces, or ADF-NALU.

This was an unlikely union between two exiled Ugandan rebel groups with vastly different ideologies, but they found common cause in the opportunity to fight Museveni's government. Mukulu was able to call upon his regional Islamist networks for funding and recruits, and NALU offered useful relationships within their co-ethnic communities on both sides of the Zaire–Uganda border. Together with Zairean and Sudanese support, the new alliance posed a potent challenge that could threaten Ugandan territory even as the front lines shifted further and further west as Kabila and his allies pushed deeper into Zaire.

Only a month after the AFDL and its Ugandan and Rwandan allies advanced into eastern Congo in October 1996, the ADF-NALU, based in Beni territory in North Kivu along the border with Uganda, launched its first operation into western Uganda. Ultimately numbering between 4,000 and 5,000 fighters, the ADF-NALU began by targeting border posts and police stations inside Uganda, before it quickly expanded its repertoire to include grisly attacks on civilians, severely disrupting life in Uganda's western border areas. This campaign failed to seriously hamper the advance of Kabila and his allies, however, and Mobutu fled Zaire on May 16, 1997. Kabila declared victory and proclaimed himself president the next day.

Over the course of the fifteen months after Kabila assumed the presidency, between May 1997 and August 1998, his relationships with his former backers soured. When he ordered the Rwandans and Ugandans—with whom he had previously worked—to leave the country for fear of being overthrown, his former cohorts sponsored a new rebellion in the east in order to topple Kabila and install a new ally, thereby precipitating Congo's second war. This second war, sometimes referred to as Africa's

World War, would become the deadliest conflict since 1945, involving the militaries of nine African states and leading to the deaths of as many as seven million people.[22] Much like Mobutu, Kabila turned toward supporting foreign rebel groups based in eastern Congo as a means of destabilizing his former allies, Rwanda and Uganda. This included the ADF-NALU.

For its part, the ADF-NALU campaign of cross-border attacks into western Uganda rapidly accelerated following the outbreak of the Second Congo War between Kabila, his former allies, and their new Congolese proxies. Between 1998 and 2000, the ADF-NALU campaign of cross-border violence killed over 1,000 Ugandans and displaced as many as 150,000.[23] Raids on isolated villages and farms, random killings, landmines, abductions, conscription and mutilations terrorized Ugandan civilians in the border region, bringing economic activity to a standstill.[24] A bombing campaign in Kampala caused significant disruption in the Ugandan capital between February and June 1999,[25] while repeated mass abductions and massacres of students in rural schools made the ADF-NALU all the more infamous.[26]

Museveni's government reacted with Operation Mountain Sweep in November 1999, both attacking the ADF-NALU's camps across the border in Congo and tracking down ADF-NALU units in the Ruwenzori Mountains, which straddled the border and served as the ADF-NALU's primary route into Uganda.[27] The offensive severely mauled the ADF, killing between 1,500 and 2,000 fighters and capturing the group's secretary general, Ali Bwambale Mulima. While the ADF remained active, by 2001 it had been reduced to a few hundred fighters, retreating into Congo where it attempted to regroup.[28]

As the ADF-NALU licked its wounds, Congo's broader war began to come to a close. Peace agreements in 2002 and 2003 saw the withdrawal of Rwandan and Ugandan troops, but they left behind a chaotic environment in which dozens of pro-Kabila and anti-Kabila militias attempted to integrate into a new Congolese military, the FARDC. However, many groups stayed out, particularly those of foreign origin like the ADF-NALU. Rebellions, mutinies, and insurgencies in eastern Congo began almost immediately after the Rwandans and Ugandans withdrew and have continued ever since, regularly erupting into violence as dozens of armed

groups sought leverage in negotiations with the government, attempted to secure control over natural resources, or fought for community interests.

In this hot peace, ADF-NALU adjusted itself to the local dynamics in the parts of eastern Congo in which it had settled. It managed to integrate itself into the economic activity and social context in the areas where it operated; the mostly Ugandan commanders married into local families; and the ADF cooperated in economic ventures with local businessmen and even FARDC officers.[29] Even prior to the end of the war in 2002, a symbiotic relationship had formed between the ADF-NALU and local communities, particularly the ethnic Vuba minority in northern Beni territory. The ADF-NALU offered muscle to local Vuba customary authorities against their enemies,[30] in a way not dissimilar to the role played by leaders of other upstart Islamic State groups in the Sahel (chapter 7). Initially opting to cooperate with some local powerbrokers, even if sometimes violently confronting others, the ADF-NALU's local focus would shift from integration to confrontation nearly a decade after its cross-border insurgency into Uganda had subsided.

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The Near Enemy

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Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo
2002–2014

DRC's 2002 peace treaty with Uganda, which saw the withdrawal of Ugandan troops and the cessation of support to the ADF-NALU from Sudan and Kinshasa, forced major changes in the group's ideology and operations. No longer useful to regional sponsors in their battle with Uganda and severely weakened by Ugandan military pressure, the group struggled to maintain its relevance, all the while being seen still as a threat by Kampala. As the ADF-NALU became more and more integrated into Beni's local political dynamics—forming alliances with partially demobilized Congolese militias that had operated in the area prior to the Ugandan withdrawal—it entered successive periods of military offensives,

demobilization and rebuilding, beginning in 2005, turning its focus away from Uganda and instead towards the local political and military dynamics in Beni territory and the local communities with which they were neighbors.

While the first of several military offensives against the ADF-NALU had been launched in December 2005,[31] and a failed cross-border raid by the ADF-NALU in March 2006 led to significant losses,[32] it was a Ugandan amnesty offered in 2007 that most empowered Mukulu as the ADF-NALU's leader. Attempts at peace talks brokered by the United Nations between the ADF-NALU and Uganda failed, but as many as 200 combatants and much of what remained of NALU surrendered and returned to Uganda.[33] With NALU effectively gone—and their demands for the recognition of the Rwenzururu kingdom being met a year later in March 2008—the ADF-NALU effectively became merely the ADF, with Mukulu as leader.[34]

Having lost one of its Ugandan components, the ADF shifted toward being an amalgamation of Mukulu's Ugandan Islamists and often press-ganged Congolese recruits and allies; already by 2007, as many as 60 percent of its fighters were Congolese, though the leadership remained primarily Ugandan.[35] Despite Mukulu's origins in Uganda's Salafist movement, his time as leader of the ADF in the context of repeated military offensives, demobilizations and large-scale recruitment of locals produced a period of ideological flux within the group: his previous dreams of overthrowing Museveni shifted toward more immediate goals of survival.

While the stated goal of the group was to overthrow Museveni and install an Islamist government in Uganda,[36] its public statements rarely referred to Islam.[37] Instead, Islamism was used as a means of maintaining discipline within the ADF's camps,[38] as many of its troops were abductees from local Congolese communities rather than radicals. In addition, Mukulu likely utilized Islamism to secure support and assistance where he could: his son's bail was paid by Kenyan Islamists following his 2011 arrest in Nairobi,[39] and Arabic-speaking military trainers reportedly gave instruction to ADF personnel in 2013.[40] It was clear, however, that whatever international ties Mukulu may have fostered, his focus remained centered on the survival of the ADF in Beni's remote forests, with little clear evidence of aspiration to membership in the global jihadist movement.

As part of his attempts to make the ADF more resilient, Mukulu built extensive recruitment and financial networks outside eastern Congo, bolstering the ADF with new recruits from Tanzania, Uganda, and Burundi, and raising funds from as far afield as London, where members of his family lived and to which he frequently traveled.[41] These regional and international connections helped sustain the group, while its continued ties to certain FARDC officers and local business leaders generated revenue and helped temper Congolese military offensives. Such operations against the ADF often angered the local civilian populations who often bore the brunt of these offensives, which almost always resulted in massive displacement.

Even as Mukulu entrenched the ADF's international networks, the group retained close ties with local Congolese allies. This led the ADF into a far more confrontational posture with the FARDC when the group gained strength in 2012 and 2013. Increased FARDC activity in Beni following the successful operation against the M23 rebellion further south led to increasing retaliatory attacks by the ADF and its allies in Beni, which often targeted civilians accused of collaborating with the FARDC. These attacks alienated local communities with which the ADF had previously enjoyed a relatively cooperative relationship,[42] and as relations with local communities continued to deteriorate, the ADF turned to increasingly violent means of compelling cooperation.[43]

Commanding between 1,200 and 1,500 combatants, with several hundred more women, children, and other non-combatants residing in its camps deep in Beni's Semuliki Forest,[44] the ADF participated in several attacks in early 2013 that culminated in the seizure of the town of Kamango near the border with Uganda on July 11. Though it was retaken the next day, the attack killed twelve and displaced tens of thousands, and put the group squarely in the crosshairs of the Congolese military. A second wave of attacks in December 2013 was retaliation for the FARDC's threats to a key ADF supply route, killing around twenty civilians.[45]

Nonetheless, the Sukola I operation that subsequently began in January 2014 damaged the ADF far more severely than previous FARDC offensives had in 2005 and 2010. The group's camps were almost entirely destroyed, hundreds of fighters were killed, and Mukulu, as already mentioned, was forced to flee Congo entirely in April 2014. As the ADF fragmented into smaller mobile bands—many suffering desertion, starvation and disease—

its leadership managed to remain largely intact. After Mukulu's escape from Madina with his family and senior leaders in April 2014,[46] the bulk of the ADF's remaining forces—by summer 2014 numbering as few as 200 combatants and non-combatants[47]—came under the command of Mukulu's deputy, Musa Baluku, as they made their way through the thick jungle away from their former headquarters at Madina.

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Musa Baluku Searches for Identity

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Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo
2014–2018

Musa Baluku was a long-time, high-ranking member of the ADF. Formerly an imam at a Tabligh mosque in Kampala before joining Mukulu in the mid-1990s, Baluku had taken the role of primary sharia judge within the ADF's camps.[48] Infamous for his brutality, he presided over numerous executions and punishments, as well as being responsible for daily preaching in the ADF's camps.[49]

Having been severely mauled, even described as on the "brink of extermination"[50] after the early 2014 Sukola I operation, the ADF under Baluku was offered a reprieve in August 2014 when Sukola I slowed subsequent to the death of the commanding officer, General Lucien Bahuma.[51] Bahuma was replaced in September 2014 by Brigadier General Muhindo Akili Mundos, who not only slowed the anti-ADF operation after Bahuma's death, but played a key role in orchestrating another, much larger campaign of massacres that would give the ADF under Baluku an opening to rebuild itself.[52]

Beginning in October 2014, armed men in Beni territory began systematically murdering civilians. While many of these massacres were certainly perpetrated by the ADF, it became clear that other local militant groups were involved, as well as Congolese military officers. Whereas the ADF sought to use the campaign of terror to deter military operations

against it, FARDC officers sought to exploit the violence in order to co-opt the disparate militia organizations that had operated in Beni for years,[53] each of which had its own rationale for engaging in indiscriminate attacks on local civilians. A common trend was for all of these different groups to pretend they were ADF, using the same ADF tactics that the group had regularly employed during the 2013 attacks on Kamango and other towns ahead of the Sukola I offensive.[54]

The ADF suffered another severe blow in April 2015 when its founder, the exiled Jamil Mukulu, was arrested in Tanzania while trying to renew his passport under a false name. After he was quickly extradited to his native Uganda to stand trial, the ADF not only lost its founder and leader of more than twenty years, but also the lynchpin of its international financial network, seriously hindering its ability to secure funding from abroad.[55] The massacres in Beni would begin to taper off over the course of the next month, though it is difficult to draw direct connections between Mukulu's arrest and the reduction in attacks given the multiplicity of actors involved in the campaign of massacres between October 2014 and May 2015.

Facing the dual blows of intense Congolese military pressure and the arrest of Mukulu, Musa Baluku began to align the ADF by early 2016 not with opportunistic local actors, but instead with the broader global Salafi-jihadist movement. Although Mukulu's rhetoric had long been couched in graphic jihadist language—he had exhorted his followers to "kill the polytheists collectively" in a sermon[56]—he had never truly oriented the ADF toward the kind of transnational jihadist identity characteristic of other jihadist groups in Africa aligned with al-Qaeda or the Islamic State. While Mukulu had dreamed of seizing power in Uganda and transforming it into a base of support for Islamist groups, Baluku saw membership in the global jihadist movement as a goal more suited to the ADF's current circumstances.[57] With Mukulu sidelined in jail in Uganda and most of the remaining ADF leadership siding with his successor's plan to reorient the group, Baluku had, by early 2016, managed to effectively supplant Mukulu's leadership, placing the ADF on the road to international affiliation despite the explicit refusals given by Mukulu from jail.[58] Indeed, in considering affiliation to the Islamic State, Baluku appeared intent on replacing the resources lost from Mukulu's international network with those that could be provided by much larger movements.

In addition to Baluku's own strategic considerations, pivotal to this shift toward the Islamic State was the influence of newcomers, including a young Ugandan man named Meddie Nkalubo, who arrived in early 2016. While most of the ADF's leadership had been part of the group since the 1990s, Nkalubo had not, and thus he had been spared experiencing the difficult circumstances following the ADF's repeated defeats at the hands of Ugandan and Congolese militaries. Instead, Nkalubo was seemingly far more familiar with the social media-driven propaganda of Islamic State and other jihadist groups, and, upon his arrival, worked to persuade Baluku that the ADF should adopt similar motifs and language. With Baluku's blessing, Nkalubo became the ADF's primary "social media manager," setting up accounts that published photos, excerpts of battles, videos and sermons beginning in summer 2016.[59]

In addition to the new social media presence, the group adopted a new name for many of these accounts, calling itself Madina at Tauheed Wau Mujahedeen (MTM, or the City of Monotheism and Holy Warriors) by October 2016.[60] This was not the first time the "MTM" name had been used; it had previously referred to the complex of camps that formed the ADF's headquarters prior to the Sukola I offensive in early 2014.[61] Perhaps most indicative of a growing affinity for the Islamic State, the ADF's propaganda began to feature a black flag with clear similarities to the battle flags used by Salafi-jihadist groups like the Islamic State and al-Shabaab in Somalia.[62]

Meanwhile, the ADF's attacks in Beni continued. By early 2016, around the time that Nkalubo arrived, the group's numbers at its primary camp—now called Madina II—had grown to between 300 and 500 fighters. Other groups of ADF personnel were stationed at its outlying camps and at transit points. Still others served in mobile units carrying out attacks:[63] groups of ADF fighters, often with their wives and children in tow, regularly emerged from the jungle to attack FARDC army units and peacekeepers from the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or MONUSCO, the world's largest UN peacekeeping mission. As the ADF attempted to deter FARDC assaults, force them to redeploy, or simply punish neighboring communities, hundreds of civilians were killed in regular, systematic massacres, as small, mobile bands of ADF combatants attacked the villages and outskirts of

larger towns along the roads abutting their forest strongholds. Many more were kidnapped, forced by the ADF fighters to carry looted medicine, food, supplies and livestock back toward their jungle camps.

As we have seen, this initial turn toward the Islamic State by ADF was spurred on by numerous factors. Not only was the group reeling from military defeats and massive casualties from Sukola I, and the loss of guidance and international connections after the arrest of the group's founding leader, but Baluku also likely saw other advantages in looking toward the Islamic State. Like other aspirant jihadi leaders that would pledge allegiance to the Islamic State, Baluku saw in the transnational jihadist movement the opportunity to solidify his own position over a group in transition, filled as it was with misgivings over his taking the helm and charting a new course in the wake of Mukulu's arrest. Moreover, there was also a new, broader strategic imperative behind his turn: Mukulu's drive to seize power in Uganda was more impossible than ever, but a shift toward alignment with the global jihadist movement was achievable. Baluku, if recognized by the global jihadist movement, would immediately enhance his own importance by becoming part of something much larger than the ADF itself. By redefining the group's *raison d'être*, Baluku could wield the legitimacy conferred upon him through the Islamic State's recognition and secure his own leadership over the ADF.

In terms of the democratization of jihad, the ADF was unlike most other African groups that pledged allegiance to the Islamic State: it had no previous sustained connections with al-Qaeda. Instead, by the time the ADF's shift in identity and rhetoric began, the Islamic State was already the premier jihadist "brand," having already established its caliphate in Iraq and Syria and already enjoying the allegiance of dozens of local jihadist insurgencies around the world. Rather than being pulled away from a pre-existing al-Qaeda orbit, Baluku saw the Islamic State as simply the clear first choice as he sought to remake his ADF into a component part of a far larger movement.

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PART TWO
THE BAYAH PERIOD

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Answering the Call

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Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo
2017–2018

By 2017, Baluku's attempts to recast the ADF's identity in line with a more international audience appear to have borne fruit, resulting in important benefits in terms of both recruitment and finance. The first clear evidence of growing transnational ties between ADF and IS Central came from a series of videos posted by ADF propaganda accounts on various social media platforms in late 2016 and over the course of 2017. One October 2017 video which brought particular attention to the ADF showed an Arab Tanzanian man with the ADF in eastern Congo, exhorting Muslims to come to Congo to fight. Wearing a uniform, carrying a belt-fed PK machine gun, and surrounded by other ADF fighters, he urged Muslims to come to Congo to join the "Dar al Jihad [Abode of Jihad], Dar al Qitl [Abode of Fighting], and Dar al Iman [Abode of Faith]" in the "Dar al Islam [Abode of Islam] of the Islamic State in Central Africa."[64] The man, Ahmad Mahamood Hassan, or Jundi as he would come to be known, had journeyed to DRC from South Africa, where he had been studying—he was hardly a typical foreign recruit to the ADF. The statements calling for recruits to join the ADF's jihad in Congo made by Jundi and other foreign ADF recruits that would emerge during the same time period—including combatants from Tanzania, Burundi, and others speaking in Kiswahili (both the Congolese and Tanzanian dialects), Luganda, Arabic, French and Kinyarwanda[65]—could be interpreted in two ways. On one hand, they were merely as an expression of solidarity with the Islamic State rather than an explicit pledge of *bayah* to IS Central from the ADF: such statements of support to IS Central were common and are discussed in other chapters on Libya (chapter 2), Algeria (chapter 3), and Tunisia (chapter 5). On the other, they were a clear, explicit and quite public assertion of the ADF's transformation from an exiled Ugandan Islamist group into a jihadist-sympathetic insurgency in eastern Congo.

Events in 2017 also demonstrated that the Islamic State began to take notice of the ADF and attempted to cultivate a relationship with it. Baluku managed to retain much of the financial support network that Mukulu had leveraged for the ADF prior to his arrest, as there had yet been no clear, clean break when Baluku took command of forces on the ground.[66] But while these relatively meager sums of money from East Africa and London could keep the group on life support, in the absence of local revenue generation streams disrupted by repeated military offensives, these legacy financial networks could not finance Baluku's more ambitious goals of rebuilding the ADF into a serious military force. Seeking alternative sources of financing, the ADF's new-found and incipient international connections with the Islamic State offered it new sources of income through a financier who laundered money to the ADF from the Islamic State.

The middleman, a Kenyan man named Waleed Ahmed Zein, reportedly traveled to eastern Congo in early 2017. Using the autopart spares company in Kenya owned by his father, who had earlier travelled to Syria to join IS Central, Zein and a female associate previously arrested for recruiting women to join Al Shabaab in Somalia, Halima Adan Ali, reportedly laundered some $150,000 to IS affiliates throughout the continent from early 2017 to June 2018.[67] While transfers to the ADF through Kampala—orchestrated by Meddie Nkalubo, the ADF's pro-IS Ugandan social media manager—were small at first, by the end of 2017 individual transfers had grown to thousands of dollars at a time.[68] Zein and Adan Ali—who had herself recruited women to make the journey to Syria[69]—were ultimately arrested in July 2018 in Mombasa. Zein was later sanctioned by US authorities as a "specially designated global terrorist" in September 2018 for moving money through the *hawala* system from "Europe, the Middle East, the Americas and Eastern Africa" to "ISIS fighters in Syria, Libya, and Central Africa."[70]

While the exact amount of money from the UK, South Africa, and Syria that reached the ADF through Uganda remains uncertain,[71] the arrested financiers were critical nodes in Islamic State's East African network and had proved immensely valuable to Baluku as he attempted to cement his position as leader of the ADF. One member of the ADF who opposed the pivot toward a transnational jihadist identity recalled that Buluku had hoped that the Islamic State would be "splashing [the ADF] with dollars and

weapons and ammunition."[72] While hopes for such extravagance may well have been overblown, Baluku was not entirely incorrect.

Despite suspicions caused by Zein's arrest, it appears that by summer 2018 the Islamic State was ready to subtly acknowledge its relations of amity with the ADF, albeit in a muted way that attracted little attention. In a passing reference by al-Baghdadi himself in a speech of August 22, 2018, the IS Central leader referred to the "sons of Islam" who had joined the caliphate. Here, he listed various *wilayat* around the world, including one in "Central Africa."[73] Nevertheless, at the time the speech was released, a formal, public *bayah* from the ADF had yet to be made.

While this relationship between the ADF and the Islamic State solidified, the ADF continued its attacks on local civilians, Congolese military bases, and UN peacekeepers. In December 2017, not long after Jundi's video was released and well after money had begun to flow to the group through Zein, the ADF launched a brazen attack on a UN military base in Beni. Armed with firearms, mortars, and rocket-propelled grenades, and wearing FARDC uniforms, the ADF fighters first attacked an attached FARDC platoon at around 5 p.m. before entering the MONUSCO base and quickly moving to disable communications equipment.[74] In four hours of fighting, 15 Tanzanian peacekeepers—members of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) intended to fight Congo's myriad rebel groups—were killed and more than 50 were injured.[75] It was the worst attack on UN peacekeeping forces since 24 Pakistani peacekeepers were killed during Operation Gothic Serpent in Mogadishu in 1993.

In another notable incident nearly a year later, on November 14, 2018, as many as 200 ADF fighters—including women and children—attacked an isolated outpost manned by UN peacekeepers and Congolese troops at Kididiwe, only six kilometers northeast of Beni city. While themselves suffering 45 deaths, the ADF fighters managed to kill 14 FARDC soldiers and 7 Malawian UN peacekeepers, and drove the FARDC and UN troops out of the base towards Beni under heavy machine gun and mortar fire.[76] The ADF, isolated and pressured though it was, remained extremely dangerous and effective, and its sustained campaign of attacks on civilians, Congolese military and UN peacekeepers earned it attention from a battered IS Central, eager for new affiliates.

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Dar al-Islam in Central Africa

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Beni, Democratic Republic of Congo
April 2019–June 2019

On April 4, 2019, Congolese president Félix Tshisekedi spoke to an audience at the Atlantic Council, a think tank in Washington, DC, and expressed his desire for Congo to become a strategic counterterrorism partner of the United States.[77] Only two weeks earlier, the US had sanctioned Congolese electoral officials for their role in rigging the election that brought Tshisekedi to power,[78] and the president was eager to reaffirm his relationship with Washington. Addressing the audience in Washington, he said:

> It is easy to see how the defeat of Daesh, the Islamic State, in Syria and Iraq, could lead to a situation where these groups are now going to come into Africa and take advantage of the pervasive poverty and also the situation of chaos that we have, for example, in Beni and Butembo, to set up their caliphate.[79]

His words were prescient, if self-interested: less than two weeks later, on April 18, 2019, IS media channels claimed two attacks on Congolese soldiers in Beni, the first time IS media had done so for attacks by the ADF. While several analysts, reporters, and think tanks focusing on the region had previously warned of potential ties, the announcement nonetheless took many by surprise. Eastern Congo had long been the scene of one of Africa's most persistent and confusing conflicts; one of the UN's largest and most expensive peacekeeping forces was stationed there,[80] and a growing Ebola outbreak had already killed nearly a thousand people by April 2019.[81] A jihadi insurgency, however, seemed far-fetched, especially one affiliated to the Islamic State.

But two weeks later, on April 29, al-Baghdadi himself appeared in a video, the first time he had been seen in a media release since his

declaration of the caliphate in June 2014. This was a very different al-Baghdadi, no longer in a black robe ascending an ornate staircase in one of the region's most famous religious sites. Instead, he was seated in a sparsely furnished room, dressed in simple clothes, and holding a rifle. This was the version of al-Baghdadi as a "guerrilla caliph," and the video focused extensively on the state of his territories following the destruction of the "territorial caliphate" in Syria and Iraq the month before, with the fall of Baghouz in eastern Syria in March 2019. Al-Baghdadi's assistant presented bound reports to the caliph on each of the Islamic State's constituent *wilayat*. One of those visible was for the "Central Africa Province."[82] That name had first been used by Jundi in his October 2017 call for fighters to come to Congo, and "Central Africa" had been listed in al-Baghdadi's August 2018 speech, but this was an even more high-profile recognition by the caliph himself of the ADF's adoption by the Islamic State. Nevertheless, a public, formal pledge of *bayah* had still not been made.

While the first hints of a relationship between the Islamic State and the ADF had been apparent long before IS Central's final loss of territory in Baghouz in March 2019—and, indeed, even before IS Central had fully lost the battles of Mosul in July 2017 and Raqqa in October 2017—by the time the Islamic State was beginning to mutedly frame the ADF as a *wilaya*, it was clear that the group's core territories were shrinking. By the time of al-Baghdadi's August 2018 speech, in which he made the first official mention of a "Central Africa" province, IS Central knew that its defeat was coming and was preparing not only for a transition back to insurgency but for an announcement of new *wilayat* to bolster its image as a global movement. The relationship with the ADF had been cultivated for more than two years by the time IS Central first began to claim ADF attacks in April 2019, and flows of money from the Islamic State had already helped boost the capabilities of a local insurgency intent on adopting the Islamic State's brand. But it was not until IS Central finally lost that last stretch of territory in eastern Syria that it began to openly claim the ADF's attacks and bring the world's attention to a new *wilaya* in Central Africa.

This relationship between the two groups of two or more years well illustrates how IS Central's process of affiliate utility validation looked at the time of al-Baghdadi's death and how its criteria for elevating insurgencies to *wilaya* status changed over time in line with its own priorities. Baluku had both sought and subsequently benefited from

recognition by IS Central, all the while repeatedly demonstrating the ADF's tactical proficiency against security forces and international peacekeepers. Its two decades of operations in eastern Congo had demonstrated its resolve and tenacity, as it recovered from repeated offensives that might have proved fatal to other militant groups. The ADF was no isolated cell, vulnerable to security forces, but perhaps one of the more capable and resilient militant groups that would ultimately be accepted by the Islamic State as a province.

But it was also true that until IS Central lost its core territories, the ADF offered few benefits, operating as it did in in isolated forests abutting population centers with no significant domestic Muslim constituency to recruit from or govern. And, thus, it was not until the Islamic State finally lost those core territories that the ADF truly demonstrated its utility to al-Baghdadi and his deputies, who were by then desperate to demonstrate their own viability as a jihadist movement. By accepting Baluku's pledge and claiming the ADF's operations as their own, IS Central could profit from its "expansion" into new battlefields. The emerging insurgency in Iraq and Syria proved how losses in one theater did not dismantle the group, while the establishment of new *wilayat* proved that they could expand the Islamic State's caliphate to new parts of the world.

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PART THREE
THE POST-BAYAH PERIOD

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Soldiers of the Caliphate

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Beni, Democratic Republic of Congo
April–November 2019

Over the next few months, the Islamic State would go on to claim that its affiliate in eastern Congo had carried out many more acts of violence in its name. Throughout May 2019, a flurry of at least nine attacks by the ADF

were claimed by IS media outlets, though the frequency of claims by IS media would slow through the course of the summer.[83] IS propaganda outlets repeatedly published media sent to them by the ADF—after April 2019, known as the Islamic State's Central Africa Province (ISCAP) wing in DRC (ISCAP–DRC)—thereby demonstrating not only the existence of communication between the two but a functioning ability on the part of the local affiliate to quickly transfer media to the Islamic State's media apparatus. Photos showing weapons and equipment captured by ISCAP–DRC were routinely published, including one from May 5, 2019, showing nearly a dozen rifles and an RPG launcher captured in ISCAP–DRC's clashes with the FARDC.[84] Other photos published at the end of May 2019 showed a dozen ISCAP combatants, heavily armed, in their camps as they listened to a sermon from a commander.[85] One of the more interesting statements issued during the flurry of claims in May 2019 was a retroactive claim of responsibility for the November 2018 attack on the Kididiwe base against FARDC and MONUSCO troops: perhaps a moment of opportunism, but it covered an attack that occurred well after al-Baghdadi's initial passing reference to the "sons of Islam" in "Central Africa" in August 2018.[86] Further, it was an opportunity to magnify ISCAP's image as a threat not only to the Congolese military and nearby civilians, but to global bodies like the United Nations.

Only a week later, on June 6, 2019, new photos were published by the Islamic State's media outlets showing ISCAP–DRC's fighters and families assembled in their camps for Eid al-Fitr prayers. While the photos demonstrated the harsh conditions in which the group operated and lived, they also underscored the ISCAP militants' ability to maintain proper religious practices despite those conditions. Perhaps most interestingly, the man giving the sermon to the assembled group of combatants and non-combatants was clean-shaven. Given that shaving was not permitted in ISCAP's camps, this suggested that the man had recently arrived: being shaven, he could travel without suspicion through the myriad checkpoints surrounding ISCAP's strongholds in Beni. Kneeling before the man was Musa Baluku and several other prominent ISCAP–DRC leaders.[87] The Eid photos, showing ISCAP's rough jungle camp of cleared brush, dotted with huts, hardly mirrored the triumphantly expansionist propaganda of IS Central at its height. Instead, this was perhaps propaganda more suited to

convey that the Islamic State was able to survive amidst hardship, and its resonant message had, even in the midst of defeat, allowed it to expand its caliphate to distant corners of the world.

Even more media would be published by the Islamic State's propaganda apparatus in July 2019. Like nearly every IS affiliate across the globe, ISCAP recorded and transmitted its reaffirmation of its pledge to al-Baghdadi as part of the "And the Best Outcome Is for the Righteous" video series. With similar surroundings to the Eid photoset, the video showed around a dozen ISCAP fighters armed with machine guns, rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, and even two Galil rifles likely captured from Tanzanian MONUSCO troops—clearly weapons with important symbolic value.[88] The fighters, among whom were several children carrying weapons and wearing FARDC uniforms, encircled a man with his face covered giving a speech. Later identified as Musa Baluku himself,[89] but labeled in the video as Abu Abdel Rahman, the man reaffirmed the group's *bayah* to al-Baghdadi, before the assembled fighters placed their hands in a circle and repeated the pledge themselves.

While perhaps this was to be expected, it is important to note that the video reaffirmed ISCAP's pledge of allegiance to al-Baghdadi. Yet, no initial pledge had been publicly released. Unlike many other African IS provinces whose *bayat* had been made publicly and then acknowledged or accepted publicly, the ADF had conducted its relationship with the Islamic State largely in secret, despite more public media releases demonstrating ideological affinity between the two groups. The July video nonetheless explicitly demonstrated what to that point had been deductions, albeit ones with a clear basis: the ADF publicly and openly considered itself part of the Islamic State, and the Islamic State considered the ADF—now ISCAP—an affiliate with the same degree of nominal standing as its affiliates in Nigeria, Libya, Somalia, and elsewhere. A *bayah* from ADF to IS Central had indeed been made, but just when, how, and by whom remained unclear.

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An Opportunity for the Enemies of the Caliphate

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Beni, Democratic Republic of Congo
April 2019–November 2019

This relationship between ADF and IS Central—opaque though present—would not be lost on Congolese president Félix Tshisekedi, whose desire to form a counterterrorism partnership with the United States became far more plausible once the ADF's July 2019 reaffirmation of its pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State became public. Even prior to the July video's release, Tshisekedi had wasted little time in attempting to rally international support to confront Congo's new IS affiliate, and DRC formally joined the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS in early June 2019.[90] In interviews, Tshisekedi claimed to have the support of the United States against the ADF/ISCAP–DRC,[91] though the coalition declined to expand its military efforts outside the Syria and Iraq theater to any of the Islamic State's affiliates around the globe, much less to its newest affiliate in eastern Congo. Tshisekedi's rhetoric nonetheless continued to escalate over the course of the summer of 2019, and he called for a regional counterterrorism coalition modeled on the US-led Coalition at the 39th Southern African Development Community summit in Dar es Salaam on August 17, 2019.[92]

Tshisekedi had promised to end the threat posed by the ADF/ISCAP–DRC during his first visit to Beni as president in April 2019, and by the end of August it became clear that the Congolese government intended to mount major operations against the newest IS affiliate there. Major General Marcel Mbangu Mashita, who had commanded the FARDC in Beni since replacing Mundos in June 2015, was himself replaced by General Jacques Nduru Ichaligonza, and the FARDC quickly announced preparations for a new "final operation" that would defeat the group once and for all. While official announcements inflated troop numbers, thousands of additional FARDC troops and national police entered Beni territory in September 2019.[93] As preparations continued, the chiefs of staff of the militaries of Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi met in Goma to discuss cooperation against ISCAP in mid-September.[94] A second round of meetings to address ISCAP in late October 2019 even included representatives from the United States' Africa Command, but simmering tensions between Rwanda and Uganda resulted in no standing agreement being reached.[95]

The costs of the attacks and atrocities carried out by the ADF—and then ISCAP—had been immense, and Tshisekedi could not afford to fail to launch a major operation against the group. Local civil society organizations had recorded the deaths of at least 2,850 civilians in the four years between the start of the massacres and the beginning of the offensive in late October 2019, while the military had announced that Congolese security forces had suffered more than 1,600 deaths in the fight against the ADF during the same period.[96] With American special forces striking a major blow against the Islamic State when they killed al-Baghdadi in an operation in northwestern Syria on October 26, 2019, the FARDC could not be far behind. Four days later, the FARDC's long-awaited operation against ISCAP was launched, albeit without the support of the regional or international partners that Tshisekedi had been attempting to enlist since April.[97]

ISCAP's response was swift and predictable. While FARDC troops were ambushed as they entered ADF-controlled zones of Beni's forests,[98] far more civilians were killed in retaliatory attacks across Beni. On November 5, 2019, ten civilians were killed in an attack near Kokola and another six FARDC soldiers died as they tried to respond.[99] Within two weeks of the launch of the offensive, nearly fifty civilians were killed in a dozen attacks by ISCAP across Beni.[100] Amid this rapid escalation in violence, the Islamic State's *Al-Naba* newsletter released photos on November 7, 2019, showing the Islamic State's Central Africa Province pledging their allegiance to the Islamic State's new caliph, Abu Ibrahim al-Qurayshi, along with every other active affiliate around the world.[101]

By the time of al-Baghdadi's death, ISCAP–DRC had received funding from the group and had clearly oriented itself toward the Islamic State's image and identity. But beyond funding, very little material support flowed to ISCAP. IS Central, during those first six months of official *wilaya* status, had demonstrated no clear command and control of ISCAP, had not shipped supplies of weaponry, and had not sent trainers and advisors to transform the group into something closer to the IS Central's vision of itself and its affiliates. Instead, ISCAP typified the "sovereign" nature of IS Central's subordinates, with IS Central providing financial support and useful membership of a global identity but leaving ISCAP operationally

autonomous as the group continued its campaign of massacres against local civilians and ambushes and raids against the Congolese military.

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The Islamic State in Eastern Congo at the Time of al-Baghdadi's Death

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Beni Territory, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo
October 2019

At the time of al-Baghdadi's death in late October 2019, the Congolese wing of the Islamic State's Central Africa Province had been a fully recognized province for only six months. While the relationship with representatives of the Islamic State stretched back almost three years to early 2017, it took the losses in Iraq and Syria before IS Central opted to fully and publicly recognize the ADF as its Central Africa Province, despite ISCAP leadership's apparent enthusiasm. The pledge of allegiance offered by Musa Baluku and the former ADF's other leaders sometime prior to full recognition in April 2019 also offered a valuable opportunity for Congolese president Félix Tshisekedi, who almost immediately sought to use the ADF's adoption by the Islamic State as a means of securing support for an offensive against the group and a means of improving relations with the United States, though he ultimately launched a major offensive against the group despite his failure to acquire international support.

What had begun as a Ugandan Salafist movement exiled to Congo evolved into a capable and durable IS affiliate. As the ADF, the group repeatedly suffered crippling defeats at the hands of Ugandan and Congolese security forces but managed to reconstitute itself under the leadership of Jamil Mukulu. It was not until his arrest in 2015 that a clear shift occurred, when his successor, Musa Baluku, opted to transform the group into a Salafi-jihadist group in the mold of the Islamic State's transnational movement, seeking to bolster his legitimacy through the support that would come with membership of such a global movement. By the time this shift occurred in late 2015 and early 2016, the Islamic State had already conquered wide swathes of Iraq and Syria, becoming the

world's foremost jihadist movement. Whereas other African jihadist groups had found in the Islamic State an alternative pole of power to al-Qaeda, by the time the ADF sought affiliation, the Islamic State was the ascendant jihadist "brand." In this sense, the Islamic State's "democratization of jihad" had already occurred, and the ADF opted to pursue ties with the most obvious available transnational movement.

As for the Islamic State, its early support for the ADF during 2017–18 cost the group very little given its considerable reserves of funds and enabled it to cultivate ties with yet another local insurgency. But it was not until the Islamic State suffered the loss of its last piece of core territory that it recalibrated its criteria for affiliate utility validation and now found the ADF a useful exemplar of its global reach. Accordingly, it formally and publicly accepted the ADF's unpublicized pledge of *bayah* and transformed the group into the Congolese wing of its Central Africa Province in April 2019.

The period that followed provided evidence of the degree of sovereignty afforded to the Islamic State's subordinate provinces. No longer able to maintain its more stringent criteria, IS Central opted to accept the ADF as an affiliate despite the group's relative isolation and inherent difficulties in closely managing its trajectory. ISCAP's integration into the Islamic State's global network thus remained limited to financial flows and media distribution. While the ADF made it clear that it considered itself part of the Islamic State, it nonetheless exercised almost total operational independence, and its activities scarcely changed from the kinds of operations carried out prior to the Islamic State's formal acceptance of *bayah*.

The ADF's transformation into ISCAP, perhaps more than that of any other affiliate in Africa, demonstrated the global appeal of the Islamic State, even though it was unable to provide durable material resources to the many local insurgencies which pledged allegiance to it. While breakaway groups or members of pre-existing al-Qaeda affiliates in other places on the continent were seen as obvious candidates for global affiliation to the Islamic State, eastern Congo and the ADF proved that isolated insurgencies with limited or even no ties to the broader transnational jihadist movement also found the brand appealing.

10

THE ISLAMIC STATE'S CENTRAL AFRICA PROVINCE—MOZAMBIQUE

PART ONE
THE PRE-BAYAH PERIOD

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An Insurgency Emerges in Northern Mozambique

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Cabo Delgado, Mozambique
2017

On the morning of October 5, 2017, the Indian Ocean town of Mocímboa da Praia, located in the northeastern Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique, found itself in disarray. Early that morning, an estimated thirty[1] armed men, some bearded, wearing shortened trousers and headscarves, and carrying machetes, knives, and firearms, walked through the streets of the port town. En-countering local residents who were headed to morning prayers, the men told them that, despite the fact they were armed, the locals should not fear them, as they were only after the police.[2]

Entering a local mosque, the armed men told congregants a similar message, but warned them that informing on the group to the police would bring harsh reprisals.[3]

The militants made good on their word. Soon thereafter, they made their way to Mocímboa da Praia district's police headquarters[4] and two other police stations.[5] Upon arriving, they claimed to be delivering a thief to the authorities, but this was merely a ruse. As an officer on duty began to take down details, one militant attacked him with a machete while other militants subdued his partners. As police reinforcements arrived, they faced rifle fire, and clashes erupted throughout the town.[6] The group of militants were attempting to free several dozen comrades who had been arrested during mass raids by Mozambican police in the preceding days at the behest of local Muslim religious leaders. Ultimately, however, the militants' efforts failed. After forty-eight hours of fighting that killed three police officers and fourteen militants,[7] calm returned to Mocímboa da Praia as police arrested dozens believed to be connected to the group.[8]

For local residents, it was almost immediately clear that the perpetrators of the attacks were a local Salafist group area referred in the area as al-Shabaab,[9] who had long been engaged in highly contentious, public disputes with local clerics over issues of Islamic doctrine. The October 2017 attacks would nonetheless prove a turning point, as al-Shabaab moved from public doctrinal disagreement towards more sustained violence. Within two years, this local al-Shabaab cell of Salafist militants in Mocímboa da Praia would grow and metastasize into a capable, well-equipped, and brutally deadly insurgency capable of launching attacks throughout as much as half of Cabo Delgado province—one which would ultimately become part of the Islamic State.

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Contestation of Muslim Religious Authority in Northern Mozambique

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Northern Mozambique
1930s–2010

The sustained violence that emerged in northern Mozambique in October 2017 was in many ways the culmination of more than a century of heated local and national disputes between multiple successive branches of Islam as they contested clerical authority in Mozambique. As Portuguese control over the mainland of contemporary Mozambique solidified in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Sufi clerics arrived in northern Mozambique through long-standing Swahili trade and migration networks, presenting their more orthodox interpretations as a more "genuine" practice of Islam than the syncretic traditionalist Islamic practices that had long predominated along the Swahili coast.[10] By the 1930s, many local leaders previously adhering to those older forms of Islam had themselves become Sufis, and various Sufi orders began to dominate northern Mozambique's clerical establishment.[11]

When Mozambique gained independence in 1975, the dominance of the northern Sufi orders was challenged by the rise of foreign-educated Salafists empowered by Mozambique's new ruling party, the Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO), which had fought Portugal during the Liberation War. Adopting orthodox Marxist positions following independence, FRELIMO aggressively curtailed religious liberty in Mozambique, a move that severely impacted on the Sufi and traditionalist clerical establishment in northern Mozambique.[12] Pivoting towards a more tolerant position in the early 1980s, FRELIMO chose to establish a national Muslim organization akin to those in neighboring countries, including Uganda.[13] Contentiously, it would place the administrative authority of this new organization in the hands of Mozambique's southern Salafists: FRELIMO perceived these southern Salafists, often of mixed Indian-African heritage, as more "modern" in their outlook and better connected to the broader Muslim world than the northern Sufis.[14]

What emerged from the FRELIMO government's efforts was the Islamic Council of Mozambique, or Conselho Islâmico de Moçambique (CISLAMO), devised at a meeting between FRELIMO officials and a group of mostly southern imams in Maputo in January 1981.[15] Officially legitimized in March 1983,[16] CISLAMO effectively empowered southern Salafists at the expense of the northern Sufis,[17] and was tasked with the management of Mozambique's mosques, Islamic schools, and other religious institutions: among other tasks, it helped in organizing hajj and

later in mobilizing northern Muslims to vote for FRELIMO during elections.[18] Critically, CISLAMO also facilitated scholarships for young Mozambican students to study abroad at Islamic universities in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, and elsewhere, an opportunity taken up by many northern Muslims who often came from Sufi households.[19]

As this new generation of northern Mozambican Muslims—educated in the same Salafist doctrinal tenets as CISLAMO rather than the Sufism of their parents' generation—returned from their studies abroad, they frequently found limited employment opportunities within the CISLAMO-run clerical hierarchy. Chafing at both the domination of CISLAMO by southern Indian-African Salafists whom they perceived to be marginalizing members from northern Mozambique[20] and at the council's perceived corruption and ineffectiveness in transforming Mozambican Muslims' standards of living, this new generation of foreign-educated northern Salafists became yet another challenger for clerical authority in northern Mozambique.

The growing frustration among this newer generation of Salafists led to the defection from CISLAMO of twenty-four members to form the Ahl al-Sunnah (People of the Prophetic Tradition) movement in 1998.[21] Concentrated most strongly in the northern Mozambique's Nampula province, just south of Cabo Delgado, Ahl al-Sunnah—rather than being a centralized, hierarchical organization like CISLAMO—was instead a decentralized movement composed of a wide variety of interconnected civil society organizations and individuals. Operating as a loose network, Ahl al-Sunnah emerged as a popular and grassroots-level movement, with a significant following among youth seeking communal support and solidarity.[22] In practical terms, these organizations focused on building mosques and madrasas, as well as a myriad of community development programs. While this dynamic network of largely autonomous, decentralized Salafist organizations mostly engaged in peaceful community outreach and development outside the stifling hierarchy and corruption of CISLAMO, some began professing a much more aggressive—and ultimately violent—rejection of northern Mozambique's clerical establishment and the government which supported it.

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Intersectional Tensions in the Contested Cape

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Cabo Delgado, Mozambique
1960s–2017

While long-running doctrinal disputes would ultimately foster a Salafist opposition in northern Mozambique, ethnic, political, and economic disparities particular to Cabo Delgado province were instrumental in setting the stage for the violence in Mocímboa da Praia in October 2017. Cabo Delgado had been the cradle of the liberation war against the Portuguese in the 1960s and 1970s, with the largely Christian Makonde of the inland Mueda Plateau serving as the nucleus of the FRELIMO insurgency and, later, Mozambique's ruling party.[23] With independence, the inland Makonde —forming around 20 percent of the population of Cabo Delgado[24]— benefited from significant state support from their co-ethnics in government, including veterans' pensions, educational opportunities, and civil service jobs.[25] The ethnic Macua, composing some 67 percent of Cabo Delgado's population, predominated in the southern and western districts of the province,[26] as well as further south into the Nampula province. Religiously mixed but predominantly Muslim in coastal areas, the Macua often felt cut off from the networks of state benefits and patronage that flowed from the FRELIMO-dominated national and local governments to the Makone, who also lived in Cabo Delgado.

Yet dissatisfaction over disparities in access to state patronage networks was perhaps felt most strongly by Cabo Delgado's ethnic Mwani people, who were concentrated along the coast and composed some 6 percent of Cabo Delgado's population.[27] Almost entirely Muslim, the Mwani were heavily involved in fishing and commercial activities on land and sea along the coast.[28] In contrast to both the Macua and Makonde, Mwani men often left school earlier, attended religious rather than secular schools, and were thus under-represented in Mozambique's postcolonial civil service and other state-backed sectors.[29] Feelings of exclusion—in the context of FRELIMO's Marxist economic policies, which placed much of the economy under state control—only compounded long-standing grievances

over Cabo Delgado's great poverty, resulting in particularly deep tensions between the Muslim Mwani and Christian Makonde residents of Mocímboa da Praia.[30]

These frustrations were expressed in Cabo Delgado's electoral politics, in which the Mwani often backed the opposition Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) party. After the 1992 peace accords ended a brutal civil war in the 1980s and afforded RENAMO the opportunity to contest elections, the party found support in the Mwani-majority districts of Cabo Delgado as the only effective opposition party against FRELIMO.[31] By the early 2000s, electoral allegiances underscored by ethnic allegiances led to the eruption of violence on several occasions, as RENAMO activists in Cabo Delgado—not incorrectly—accused FRELIMO of rigging the elections.[32] These patterns of violence occurred along many of the same lines and in many of the same areas as the jihadist insurgency that would erupt more than a decade later. RENAMO was certainly no Islamist party, but its popularity within certain constituencies in Cabo Delgado reflected a popular anger that jihadists would in some ways later co-opt.

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It was in this context—of a northern, decentralized Salafist movement often working in opposition to the postcolonial FRELIMO government, inter-ethnic tensions, and frustration amid poverty and limited government support—that radicalism took hold in Mozambique in the late 2000s. While the broader Ahl al-Sunnah movement, anti-government as it was, focused primarily on the provision of education and broader community development in the absence of a state presence, certain sects operating in northern Mozambique's milieu of anti-government Salafist organizations developed a more confrontational outlook. These sects, themselves a decentralized radical subset of the decentralized Salafist movement, began advocating a complete separation from the Mozambican state, demanding abstention from participation in state-led education, rejection of voting, and refusal to cooperate with law enforcement.[33] According to Eric Morier-Genoud, several of these rejectionist "sects" of Ahl al-Sunnah—often referred to as al-Shabaab, or "the youth"—emerged in multiple locations throughout Cabo Delgado as early as 2007, demanding far more rigid

interpretations of Islamic practice and rejecting the legitimacy of the state's secular institutions.[34] (While none of these local clerics were known to have had connections to the far more well-known Somali group named al-Shabaab, the popular use of the moniker al-Shabaab by locals referred to both the relative youth of the members of these rejectionist sects and to their radical political and religious views that mimicked those in Somalia.)[35] Mozambique's al-Shabaab members were influenced by extremists like the Kenyan radical Aboud Rogo Mohammed[36]—himself accused of facilitating funding to al-Shabaab militants in Somalia—whose sermons had become easily accessible via tapes, CDs, and, later, increasingly ubiquitous smartphones with internet access.[37]

Tensions soon increased between these separatist, anti-government al-Shabaab sects and the CISLAMO-affiliated sheikhs who led mosques in the Cabo Delgado region. When al-Shabaab members' puritanical critiques of these comparatively less orthodox sheikhs led to them being expelled from Cabo Delgado mosques, they went on to establish their own mosques in private homes or even in simple sheds. While attendance at individual al-Shabaab mosques remained relatively limited—the increasingly confrontational behavior of these rejectionist clerics alienated some would-be congregants—the movement collectively managed by the early 2010s to attract followers in multiple towns and villages in Cabo Delgado and Nampula provinces.[38]

The October 2017 attacks described above were certainly the largest of al-Shabaab's attacks to date and the start of a subsequently sustained insurgency, but they were not the first incidents of violence perpetrated by the strengthening movement. Between 2015 and 2017, these al-Shabaab elements repeatedly came into violent conflict with local government-backed religious authorities.[39] On November 5, 2015, a group of young men affiliated with one such al-Shabaab sect entered several stores in the town of Pangane on the coast of Cabo Delgado and smashed bottles of alcohol, which were prohibited under Islam but tolerated by Mozambique's secular government. As shop owners called the police, violent riots broke out in which a police officer was stabbed to death and two rioters wounded, leading much of the population to flee the town into surrounding forests and onto nearby islands.[40] On November 2, 2016, members of another al-Shabaab group in the rural town of Intutupue in Cabo Delgado clashed with

a rival group of Muslims, killing one person.[41] Six of the sect members fled to Chiure, a nearby town, attempting to hide in the mosque of another radical cleric who was known to local authorities for his loud denunciations of local CISLAMO-affiliated clerics and secular public holidays. On the day after the arrival of the group of fugitives from Intutupue, a mob destroyed the radicals' mosque in Chiure, leading to another riot in which the mosque's leader, Abdul Carimo, was shot and arrested.[42] By early 2017, mainstream clerics in Mocímboa da Praia began to complain of regular death threats from al-Shabaab members, who continued to be expelled from mosques for their denunciations of sheikhs they deemed too moderate. As the police began to crack down and make arrests in May 2017[43]—jailing local al-Shabaab members at the behest of CISLAMO-affiliated clerics—tensions escalated even further.

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An Insurgency Grows

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Cabo Delgado, Mozambique
October 2017–May 2018

The violence that broke out in Mocímboa da Praia had been spurred by local arrests, as elsewhere in Cabo Delgado, but it did not end when police secured the town. Between October 2017 and May 2018, al-Shabaab members killed dozens of civilians and security personnel, concentrated in the mixed Mwani and Makonde areas north of Mocímboa da Praia.[44] Some of al-Shabaab's first targets were police. Ambushing a police patrol in Maculo, some twelve kilometers north of Mocímboa da Praia, on October 12, 2017—only a week after the police attacks in that town—the newborn insurgency killed four officers.[45] Within the next six weeks, al-Shabaab began attacking entire villages: on November 30, 2017, fighters raided Mitumbate, a small village about ten kilometers from Mocímboa da Praia, killing two civilians and burning more than two dozen homes.[46] These tactics—involving small units of insurgent fighters entering villages, killing

civilians, and burning large numbers of homes—would become a hallmark of the insurgency, as it sought to terrorize local civilians with beheadings and other grisly acts of violence into fleeing their homes, and to put pressure on security forces, who found it difficult to react to attacks on isolated, outlying villages.

While the frequency and geographic spread of al-Shabaab's attacks grew between late 2017 and 2018, the emerging insurgency's leadership remained opaque. The first individuals named by government officials as leaders of the movement in December 2017,[47] Jafar Alawi and Nuro Adremane, were Mozambican businessmen in Mocímboa da Praia. Both men had been involved in the radical movement along the East African coast for several years, having purportedly studied in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Tanzania,[48] likely through the same kinds of CISLAMO scholarships that had facilitated the rise of Ahl al-Sunnah and similar Salafist opposition organizations. An August 2018 statement to the press by the general commander of the Mozambican police, Bernardino Rafael, listed ten individuals as key figures within the movement, including several whose names would become far more prominent in the years to come.[49]

Some clarity on prominent individuals, their backgrounds, and the group's leadership structure was offered in a September 2019 report based on fieldwork conducted during the four months after the October 2017 attacks in Mocímboa da Praia. While key individuals were not named, it was clear that many of the group's members—just as Jafar Alawi and Nuro Adremane purportedly had been—were heavily involved in cross-border commercial activities between northern Mozambique and southern Tanzania. One man considered by locals to be the leader of the group was one such cross-border trader, originally from the small village of Malinde, sixteen kilometers northeast of Mocímboa da Praia, and the son of a local *mwalimu*, or teacher.[50] Together with several other unnamed individuals, they collectively formed a "Supreme Council", staffed by the most prominent clerics and financiers of the Mocímboa da Praia cells that had launched the October 2017 attacks.[51]

One individual mentioned both in the August 2018 statement by police and in more detail in later reporting in many ways exemplified the profiles of members of the original core of what would later become ISCAP–Mozambique. Bonomade Machude Omar was a native of Mocímboa da

Praia and the son of a local teacher and politician. While studying Islam abroad before returning to Cabo Delgado and working with a Kuwaiti charity, he became more commonly known by his *kunya*, Ibn Omar, and went on to become a key field commander after the first attacks in October 2017.[52] Alongside Ibn Omar was Abdala Likongo, also a Mocímboa da Praia native, who hosted early sect meetings at his home and reportedly played a key role in the October 2017 attack itself. Likongo had not received the kind of formal education that Ibn Omar had, but his commercial livelihood was reportedly boosted by a major injection of funds prior to the outbreak of violence, and he was rumored to have gone to eastern Congo—possibly integrating with the Allied Democratic Forces there—along with Ibn Omar to study Islam and receive military training.[53]

That so many of al-Shabaab's early leaders were engaged in cross-border trade was likely determinative of the group's future trajectory. Mwani traders had long taken part in this commerce, often using the near-ubiquitous dhows that plied the "Swahili coast." Mwani families in Mozambique often sent their children to study in madrasas in Tanzania, and these networks were often cemented through intermarriage.[54] Many of these commercial and personal networks were also deeply involved in Cabo Delgado's highly lucrative trafficking networks—involving heroin, poaching, gemstones, ivory, and illegal timber exports—as illicit goods crossed the border or were traded by sea.[55] While particular accounts of specific individuals are difficult to confirm, the biographies of these men were consistent with what was known about al-Shabaab's murky and secretive early leadership, and their backgrounds in regional trade would be reflected in the regional composition of al-Shabaab's membership.

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A Local Insurgency with a Regional Character

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Uganda and Tanzania
2015–2018

Just as many Mozambican members of al-Shabaab's Supreme Council had extensive cross-border ties with Tanzania, so too many Tanzanians had extensive cross-border ties with Mozambique. Large numbers of Tanzanians frequently traveled south into northern Mozambique and lived in Mocímboa da Praia and other towns. Well-integrated into local communities, these Tanzanians joined many of the same mosques, including the al-Shabaab sect in Mocímboa da Praia, whose Supreme Council included as many as three Tanzanians.[56] Among them was a man referred to by locals as Sheikh Hassan, a Tanzanian man who lived in Mocímboa da Praia for some time and had purportedly fought in Somalia with the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Shabaab, before reportedly playing a crucial role in logistics and military training for Mocímboa da Praia's radicals.[57] Cabo Delgado's insurgency was thus a product of local grievances, but one foundationally shaped from the outset by both Mozambican and Tanzanian radicals and the cross-border networks that connected them.

While Tanzanians residing in Cabo Delgado explained much of the Tanzanian presence in leadership roles in al-Shabaab, significant push factors in Tanzania had also helped transform the organization and its area of operations into a refuge and destination for Salafist militants from Mozambique's northern neighbor. Tanzanian Salafist activists and organizations had long helped recruit Tanzanians and raise money to send north to the Somali al-Shabaab. In the northern Tanzanian city of Tanga, for instance, Sheikh Salim Abdulrahim Barahiyan's Ansar Muslim Youth Centre (AMYC) advocated extremist views and rejected all cooperation with the Tanzanian state,[58] while Kenyan Salafists utilized their ties with the AMYC to recruit Tanzanians to fight in Somalia.[59] In this way, a significant jihadist recruitment network was created in Tanzania, though until 2015 it primarily served to recruit Tanzanians to fight abroad for Somalia's al-Qaeda affiliate rather than to engage in violence domestically.

This began to change in April 2016 when a group comprising Kenyan, Tanzanian, and Ugandan members of the Somali-based al-Shabaab and calling itself Jabhat East Africa announced its split from the Somali group owing to discrimination against non-Somali members, and pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi.[60] While Jabhat East Africa claimed to have bases deep in Tanzania, it never mounted operations there. However, violent actions would be taken by a group in Tanga the next month. In May 2016, a

short, dark, and grainy video was shared on social media showing around half-a-dozen young men—with faces covered and wielding AK-pattern rifles—posing in front of a homemade version of the Black Standard, pledging allegiance to al-Baghdadi. Calling themselves Ahl al-Kahf, or People of the Cave,[61] they went on to carry out a brutal attack on nearby civilians a month later,[62] before a nationwide police crackdown on jihadists a year later forced several of the militants to flee south to Mozambique.[63]

This broader Tanzanian crackdown was the government's response to an even more serious wave of killings and bank robberies by a murky jihadist group in and near Kibiti, roughly a hundred kilometers south of Dar es Salaam, that had begun in 2015. Between April and July 2017, this group—which never announced its name and which was not known to be affiliated to any transnational jihadist groups—escalated its campaign of assassinations, killing more than thirty officials of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party, local leaders, and police, before a harsh government crackdown dispersed the group in summer 2017.[64] In what was already a major recruitment hotspot for pro-al-Shabaab networks smuggling recruits into Kenya and Somalia,[65] the crackdown killed over a dozen militants and reportedly caused others to flee into northern Mozambique, almost certainly along the same routes and networks as the Tanga militants who fled to Mozambique around the same time.[66] It is thus perhaps no coincidence that Tanzanian radicals had fled to northern Mozambique only months prior to the outbreak of violence in Mozambique,[67] as the Tanzanian crackdown propelled active insurgents—some of whom had already pledged allegiance to the Islamic State—into Cabo Delgado.

Tanzanian recruits continued to travel to Mozambique soon after the insurgency began. By March 2018, only five months after the initial October 2017 attack in Cabo Delgado, Mozambican state media broadcast images of men of "Asian descent"[68]—possibly Tanzanians of Arab descent—who had been purportedly killed in fighting in Mocímboa da Praia. Dozens of Tanzanians were arrested in Mozambique in connection with militant activity over the course of several months in the summer and fall of 2018,[69] and over the same period 104 individuals suspected of wanting to join Mozambique's al-Shabaab were arrested by Tanzanian authorities before they could cross the border into Mozambique.[70] Significantly, when,

in March 2021, the US government finally designated a man named Abu Yasir Hassan as the future ISCAP–Mozambique's leader, it stated that he—his identity has not been confirmed—was originally from the Pwani region in Tanzania.[71]

Beyond Tanzanians who had in many cases arrived in Cabo Delgado prior to the October 2017 attacks in Mocímboa da Praia, Mozambique's al-Shabaab also quickly attracted jihadists from elsewhere in the region after the insurgency began. In January 2018, three Ugandans were arrested in Mocímboa da Praia on terrorism charges, having left Uganda only a month prior.[72] Their arrests initially went unreported, until Mozambique informed its Ugandan counterparts of the arrests in May 2018, and details began to emerge about the men's backgrounds. It became clear that one of the three—a man named Abdul Faisal[73]—was previously the imam of the Usafi Mosque[74] in Kampala, and reportedly had once had ties to the Allied Democratic Forces in eastern Congo. Having sidelined the mosque's founder, Faisal more openly aligned himself with the ADF, reportedly telling his followers that their leader was Jamil Mukulu, head of the ADF, and that the congregants' "ultimate place to be was the 'Dawla Islamiya' [Islamic State] which our emir [Mukulu] had created for us in the Democratic Republic of Congo."[75]

Given the short time between Faisal's leaving Uganda and his arrest in Mocímboa da Praia, it is unlikely he had much to do with Mozambique's insurgency. Remaining in Mozambican custody despite Ugandan requests for his extradition, Faisal was presented to the press nearly a year later in January 2019, saying that he had committed no crimes, but was searching for a former comrade whom he had last seen in Congo.[76] Whether this explanation was true remains undetermined, but Faisal's own decision to journey to Mocímboa da Praia demonstrated an interest in Cabo Delgado by militants connected to the ADF, which was itself at that time publicly expressing its desire to affiliate with the Islamic State.[77] While Abdul Faisal's capture would have a negligible impact on both the scale and intensity of Mozambique's insurgency, which rapidly began to expand its areas of operation only a few months later, it likely spurred increased regional cooperation on counterterrorism issues, for Mozambique signed counterterrorism cooperation agreements with Tanzania in January 2018 and with Uganda in May 2018.[78]

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A Pledge Presaged

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Cabo Delgado, Mozambique
2018

As its violence—abetted by a combination of local and international influences—expanded throughout early 2018, worrying rumors began to churn about al-Shabaab's intentions and affiliations. In May 2018, a picture began circulating on an IS supporter's Telegram channel showing six militants in Mozambique. Standing in front of what appeared to be a homemade version of the Islamic State's flag, two militants had their faces covered with *keffiyehs*, while four held AK-pattern rifles. An accompanying caption stated that a pledge to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi would soon follow.[79]

The circulation of this picture was a surprise: while al-Shabaab's ideological origins in Cabo Delgado's rejectionist and sometimes violent Salafist movement were clear, up to that point the group appeared to have no international connections beyond its Tanzanian and Ugandan members, whose presence demonstrated the regional, East African nature of Cabo Delgado's Salafist following more than it did al-Shabaab's connections to transnational jihadism. Indeed, while some of the Tanzanian "People of the Cave" group that pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in 2016 had reportedly fled to Mozambique, there had still been—up to that point—no evidence of IS connections within Cabo Delgado itself. Al-Shabaab's leaders, secretive as they were, showed no clear sign of relations with either the Islamic State or al-Qaeda, much less that they were an official affiliate of either group.

Further reports underscored the extent to which Cabo Delgado had come to be seen as a destination not only for regional jihadist militants, but also for foreign individuals explicitly aligned with the Islamic State. In subsequent reporting, it was revealed that two of the individuals from the May 2018 Telegram picture were South Africans, one of whom had previously attempted to travel to Syria to join the Islamic State but was prevented from boarding his flight;[80] instead he opted to join

Mozambique's jihadists in early 2018 along with fifteen other South Africans.[81] This revelation bore strong similarities to the appearance of the Tanzanian Ahmad "Jundi" Mahamood, who left his studies in South Africa before reappearing in Congo with the ADF and making a similarly aspirational pronouncement that eastern Congo's jihadists were part of the Islamic State (see chapter 9). By May 2018, it was clear that some South African radicals saw Cabo Delgado as a destination to join the global jihadist movement without making the seemingly impossible journey to Syria, which by that time was effectively closed to aspirant foreign fighters as IS Central came under ever-increasing military pressure.

Mozambique thus presents a unique case in the argument of this book: rather than the Islamic State "democratizing jihad" through offering Mozambique's insurgency an alternative to affiliation with al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab instead from the outset attracted militants already ideologically aligned with the Islamic State. The choice between Islamic State and al-Qaeda had in many ways already been made, both by Tanzanians who saw the Islamic State as a more attractive option than the long-standing networks aiding the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Shabaab in Somalia, and by South Africans whose entry into jihadist militancy was more typical of individual radicalization than group decision-making. By early 2018, the Islamic State was simply the most direct and obvious choice for international affiliation, especially given the international connections that al-Shabaab had seemingly cultivated up to that point. Indeed, these pre-existing connections perhaps explain why al-Shabaab ultimately sought to become an IS affiliate despite IS Central's own decline during the same period. The broad factors that apparently shaped al-Shabaab's future affiliation had already been many years in the making.

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PART TWO
BAYAH PERIOD

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An Escalating Crisis

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Cabo Delgado, Mozambique
May 2018–June 2019

At the same time that al-Shabaab's potential orientation toward the Islamic State became clearer in early 2018, Mozambican security forces revealed their inability to contain the insurgency. Expanding its area of operations from the villages north of its birthplace in Mocímboa da Praia, al-Shabaab launched attacks in Nangade district, roughly fifty kilometers northwest of Mocímboa da Praia, situated in part of the ethnic Makonde heartland. By mid-summer 2018, insurgent activity had also rapidly expanded south of Mocímboa da Praia into Macomia district, home to one of the largest settlements of ethnic Mwani" to "whose coastal areas, much as in Mocimboa da Praia, were home to substantial numbers of ethnic Mwani. Al-Shabaab launched raids and ambushes on civilians and security forces alike, with little distinction along religious or ethnic lines. In many cases, insurgent tactics involved small units of fighters entering isolated, rural villages at dusk or dawn, killing several people, looting homes and stores, and burning large numbers of homes. It was clearly a systematic, brutal assault on the civilian population, and one which security forces struggled to counter.

On June 5, 2018, for instance, al-Shabaab fighters entered Naunde village in Macomia district, and killed seven civilians. Six victims were hacked to death with machetes, including a local imam, who was beheaded in a nearby field. Some 164 homes were burned, displacing most of the population.[82] In revenge for a military operation nearby against insurgents five days earlier, on August 21, 2018, al-Shabaab attacked Pundanhar village along the road from Nangade to Palma near the Tanzanian border, sixty kilometers northwest of Mocímboa da Praia. The insurgents burned several homes and destroyed the local administration building, injuring one person and causing hundreds to flee across the border into Tanzania.[83] In December 2018 alone, al-Shabaab launched no less than twenty attacks over an area of 14,000 square kilometers in five different districts in northeastern Cabo Delgado, demonstrating its significantly expanded reach little more than a year after the insurgency began.[84]

By early 2019, the al-Shabaab insurgency was managing to sustain its activities throughout Mocímboa da Praia district, in much of Palma district along the Tanzanian border, carrying out raids deep into Nangade district and launching attacks across most of Macomia district. While frequent, most attacks remained relatively small in scope, typically involving small groups of insurgents assaulting isolated villages and towns, killing civilians and looting food, medicine and other goods. Al-Shabaab fighters also staged ambushes on major roads, including an attack on January 13, 2019, on a minibus that killed fifteen on the road between Olumbi and Muite, roughly halfway between Mocímboa da Praia and the northern city of Palma.[85]

The breadth, consistency, and frequency of attacks made it clear that Mozambique's security forces were overstretched, unable to contain either the insurgency's geographic spread or its continued ability to raid villages and ambush civilians and military personnel on roads. Al-Shabaab appeared to be indiscriminate in its choice of targets, launching attacks on Muslim and Christian residents of Cabo Delgado alike, and staging attacks in areas with large Mwani populations just as frequently as it attacked areas where few ethnic Mwani lived, despite the group's origins in Mwani communities along the coast. Much as the original sect in Mocímboa da Praia had denounced any Muslims who failed to abide by the sect's interpretation of Islam, the insurgency appeared to believe that almost anyone could be a target. And yet, up to that date, the pledge of *bayah* to the Islamic State was nowhere to be seen.

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Gambling on Gas

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Cabo Delgado, Mozambique
2018

The escalating insurgency also began to impose itself on what was perhaps the single most critical element of the Mozambican government's plans for economic development: the natural gas sector. Cabo Delgado had long been

one of Mozambique's poorest and most marginalized provinces—despite being the birthplace of the ruling FRELIMO party and President Filipe Nyusi's home province—but discoveries of immense natural gas deposits both onshore and offshore in October 2011[86] promised to transform Mozambique into Africa's third-largest natural gas exporter, after Algeria and Nigeria.

The discovery was touted as being nothing short of a game changer. Some industry analysts estimated the fields were worth as much as $150 billion, more than ten times Mozambique's annual GDP; for its part, Mozambique stood to earn as much as 30 percent of the total.[87] Headed by American oil company Anadarko Petroleum with partial ownership by other companies, the project began to build an immense, $20 billion gas processing and export facility on the Afungi peninsula in 2018, some sixty kilometers north of Mocímboa da Praia and just southeast of the northern city of Palma.

Officials promised that the natural gas discovery would revolutionize Mozambique's economy, but for locals it meant the physical and economic displacement of some 7,200 residents of the Afungi peninsula.[88] Even on optimistic projections, production would take over a decade to begin, and there were questions about how much local residents would benefit from the vast wealth lying below their feet and beneath their fishing grounds. For all the government's promises, people on the coast saw little benefit, and had little faith that this promised wealth would reach them. They suspected that it would more likely flow through the same channels of ethnic favoritism and patronage that typified other state benefits. Grievances like these helped shape the insurgency emerging approximately fifty kilometers south of the project near Mocímboa da Praia.

Even as the insurgency's activity accelerated in 2018, construction on the gas liquefaction infrastructure and export terminal continued apace. Construction of the primary housing complex for contractors began in February 2018, while that of a dedicated airstrip began in September.[89] Only days after Anadarko gave its final approval to begin construction on the Afungi project, al-Shabaab launched an attack on Maganja village, less than ten kilometers away from the primary housing complex, killing five and burning as many as 120 homes.[90] As the closest major town to the project, Palma, possessed no deep water port suitable for importing

construction material, most material had to be delivered to Mocímboa da Praia, sixty kilometers south of the project, and driven north to Afungi, directly through areas hit hard by the insurgency along the R775 road.

On February 21, 2019, the project's vulnerabilities would be made clear. On that morning, al-Shabaab staged simultaneous assaults on two villages along the road from Mocímboa da Praia to Palma, killing seven and burning nearly eighty homes in Ngueo and Matapata.[91] Coincidentally, an Anadarko convoy had been traveling north to the project and was on the road between the two villages as they came under attack. Realizing that Matapata was under attack as they approached, the convoy turned around and headed back south towards Mocímboa da Praia, but was then quickly ambushed roughly halfway between the villages under attack. Six contractors were wounded, and one subcontractor employed by a Portuguese company was reportedly beheaded, the first act of direct violence against personnel working on the Afungi project.[92] Just weeks previously, Anadarko had pledged to strengthen local security, especially against the rising militant threat.[93]

The attack raised worrying questions about al-Shabaab's potential future targets: though the insurgency had up to that point only targeted local civilians and security personnel, it was becoming clear that it had the tactical wherewithal and presence on the ground to attack personnel and supply lines for the gas project. While journalist Samuel Ratner believed that the ambush on Anadarko personnel was "a case of the convoy being in the wrong place at the wrong time,"[94]—as al-Shabaab had repeatedly attacked other civilian and military traffic on that same road[95]—it nonetheless raised concerns. Al-Shabaab had scrupulously managed to avoid attacking gas infrastructure and personnel despite targeting numerous villages and vehicles in the immediate vicinity, and the Anadarko ambush was a startling reminder that this could change. As various companies operating at the site reacted to the Anadarko ambush by restricting activities and delaying work schedules on a project slated to be worth as much as $50 billion,[96] the attack proved the project's vulnerability should al-Shabaab begin to target it consistently. More than simply a remote and localized insurgency, al-Shabaab was increasingly showing itself capable of disrupting Mozambique's broader national development goals.

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Answering the Call

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Cabo Delgado, Mozambique
June 2019

While the insurgency's reach had grown significantly in the year since the May 2018 photo of al-Shabaab militants pledging allegiance to the Islamic State, there had been few indications of growing ties between the two. Al-Shabaab remained a particularly secretive group whose leadership was not as well understood as that of other jihadist insurgencies in Africa; it had no official media output; and there was little clarity about the group's intentions or ideological affinities.[97] While clearly jihadists, al-Shabaab appeared to be a local phenomenon benefiting from regional recruitment networks, rather than the kind of transnationally sympathetic jihadist insurgency seen in elsewhere on the continent. Nor, most importantly, had the pledge of *bayah* yet materialized.

It thus came as a surprise when on June 4, 2019, the Islamic State issued a claim for an attack in Mozambique. The short release via IS Telegram channels said that the "soldiers of the Caliphate" had repelled an attack by the Mozambican army in the village of Mitope, located approximately seventy kilometers west of Mocímboa da Praia. Brief, vague, and accompanied by two photos showing captured weapons but nothing else, the statement confirmed little about the veracity of the Islamic State's claim and it matched no local media reports of recent violence near the village.[98] Perhaps more puzzling was the nomenclature by which IS Central referred to the "soldiers": the IS Central release attributed the al-Shabaab militants' attacks to members of its "Central Africa Province," the same name that it had begun using to claim attacks by the ADF in eastern Congo six weeks prior.[99]

While it would appear that the aspirations of the individuals in the May 2018 photo had finally come to fruition more than a year later, the Islamic State's June 2019 claim that its soldiers had carried out violence in Mozambique raised more questions than it offered answers. By the time IS Central issued its claim, al-Shabaab had released no public *bayah* video or statement; nor, conversely, had IS Central issued public recognition of al-

Shabaab before naming it part of the Central Africa Province. Yet, crucially, the release of photos via Telegram along with the claim indicated that al-Shabaab did most likely possess media teams producing content and sending it to IS Central's media apparatus.

Why would the Islamic State recognize al-Shabaab as an affiliate? Much as with the recognition of the ADF, the most important factor was IS Central's own decline in Iraq and Syria. Only two and a half months before, IS Central had lost its final stretch of territory at Baghouz, Syria, and with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in hiding, it was likely that it sought to demonstrate its global reach. Al-Shabaab's insurgency, while relatively sparsely reported in the international media until then, had demonstrated its capacity for sustained violence, which was underwritten by an interpretation of Salafi jihadism that IS Central could appreciate. In addition to being able to bolster IS Central's bruised global image, the geopolitical implications of al-Shabaab's proximity to the natural gas project in Afungi—which was headed by an American company—and its access to the Indian Ocean offered the prospect of notoriety in ways that affiliates in more marginal locations could not. At a time when the Islamic State's own position as the world's foremost transnational jihadist brand was under threat, the opportunity to accept—and propagandize—yet another affiliate in Africa was attractive. Al-Shabaab in Mozambique thus met the Islamic State's changing requirements for affiliate utility validation, shifting as they had from an emphasis on affiliates' demonstration of their capacity for sustained violence and durability, to meeting the less ambitious goal of demonstrating the Islamic State's global appeal.

Yet with no public *bayah* from al-Shabaab and no formal recognition by IS Central—just claims of violence—questions remained. What was, in fact, the nature of the relationship between al-Shabaab and IS Central? Was the latter unjustly claiming the latter's attacks without the former's approval? If al-Shabaab had indeed pledged allegiance to IS Central, why had neither party publicly announced it by means of a dedicated statement, as so many other affiliates had done? These questions would, until al-Baghdadi's death, remain unanswered by both al-Shabaab and the Islamic State, and the latter would simply go on to publish more claims and media releases. Al-Shabaab's own internal secrecy similarly shielded observers from understanding its true internal structure or leadership, just as its inclusion as part of the Islamic State's Central Africa Province raised

further questions about the degree to which each ISCAP "wing" communicated with its counterpart. While it was clear that the Islamic State considered al-Shabaab an affiliate, the lack of clarity about al-Shabaab's degree of integration into the Islamic State nonetheless remained far more difficult to determine than with the Islamic State's other affiliates in Africa.

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PART THREE
THE POST-BAYAH PERIOD

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A Very Different Trajectory

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Cabo Delgado, Mozambique
June–November 2019

Surprising as they may have been, IS Central's claims of violence committed by the Mozambican wing of its Central Africa Province continued. Over the course of summer 2019, more claims of attacks by the Central Africa Province in Mozambique, along with pictures, were issued by the Islamic State's media apparatus. On July 5, 2019, IS media claimed an al-Shabaab attack on a Mozambican army barracks in Nangade,[100] again publishing a photo of captured weapons the next day.[101]

On July 24, 2019, however, an even more important media release offered further indications of the deepening ties between Mozambique's jihadist insurgency and the Islamic State. As part of its series of videos entitled "And the Best Outcome Is for the Righteous," which detailed nearly all the affiliates reaffirming their commitment after the fall of Baghouz, footage from both eastern Congo and Mozambique showed fighters gathering in a circle and putting their hands together.[102] While the section of the video pertaining to Mozambique was limited to one shot, with the remainder comprising a speech by an ISCAP leader, the video was important for its explicit emphasis on both branches of ISCAP renewing

their pledges of allegiance. This indicated that al-Shabaab's official pledge of *bayah* to the Islamic State—almost certainly distinct from the May 2018 photo, which was itself likely not the actual pledge—had already occurred prior to the first attack claim on June 4, 2019. Just when, how, and between whom that pledge had occurred remained unclear.

More claims in IS media of al-Shabaab attacks, along with photos, were released over the coming months. A July 25 release by the Islamic State's media channels claimed a revenge attack on the "agents and collaborators" of the Mozambican army in Maculo, a village twelve kilometers northeast of Mocímboa da Praia,[103] and an attack on August 3 involving the burning of Christian homes in Muagamula, a village seven kilometers north of Macomia.[104] Local reporting indicated continuity rather than change in the types of targets attacked by al-Shabaab in the months following IS Central's public "adoption" of al-Shabaab, and it was clear that al-Shabaab's activities were being framed by IS Central in terms similar to its propaganda claims of activities elsewhere. Collaborators, Christians and the Mozambican military were all legitimate targets for both al-Shabaab itself and the Islamic State, much as the latter justified similar actions and atrocities by its affiliates across the world.

Yet the way that the Mozambique government sought to address the incipient wing of ISCAP would vary dramatically from the approach taken by the DRC to its own ISCAP wing. While Congolese president Félix Tshisekedi requested assistance from a variety of regional and international actors to prepare an offensive against the Congolese wing of ISCAP during the summer of 2019, the Mozambican wing of ISCAP faced no comparable impending pressure from the national government. Whereas Tshisekedi clearly and consistently framed the ADF as an IS affiliate in his pursuit of counterterrorism assistance, the Mozambican government instead elected to downplay al-Shabaab's ties to the Islamic State.[105] Rightly calculating that recognition of al-Shabaab as an IS affiliate might harm prospects for further investment in Cabo Delgado's gas project, the Mozambican government instead described the insurgency as bandits,[106] and projected confidence that its security forces would "combat whatever wrongdoers do."[107]

In reality, however, the government's public confidence was less well founded. It began to impose severe limitations on journalists attempting to operate in Cabo Delgado, barring them from the province and arresting, on

spurious charges, those who attempted to report on the crisis.[108] Security forces often engaged in horrific abuses against civilians in areas in which the insurgency operated, and were repeatedly reported as being involved in torture, forced disappearances and extrajudicial executions, all behavior that undoubtedly helped insurgent recruitment.[109] It was clear that the government could not effectively target the insurgency, and was instead directing its energy toward nearby civilians and journalists who might report on such behavior.

The hollowness of the government's public confidence was also belied by its recognition that the situation was beyond its ability to handle alone: Mozambique soon invited foreign forces to assist in combating the al-Shabaab/ISCAP–Mozambique insurgency. Several weeks after Mozambican president Filipe Nyusi signed security cooperation and energy investment deals with Russia on August 22, 2019,[110] 203 members of the Wagner Group of mercenaries landed in Mozambique, accompanied by a Russian heavy-lift cargo plane carrying three MI-17 attack helicopters.[111] Largely composed of Russian ex-soldiers and owned by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close ally of Russian president Vladimir Putin, Wagner had previously deployed personnel in Syria, Libya, and Central African Republic, providing well-trained combat personnel to train local forces and sometimes fight on their behalf.[112] The Wagner Group's entrance, it was later revealed, had followed a contentious bidding war between private military contractors offering to bolster Mozambique's overstretched security forces, with Wagner beating bids by both former Blackwater head Erik Prince and former Executive Outcomes head Eeben Barlow.[113]

Wagner's arrival in Mozambique amid recently signed gas deals raised concerns that Russia was attempting to use the deployment to both bolster its influence in southern Africa and secure access to Mozambique's natural resources, previously the domain of American and then French companies.[114] Adding to suspicions, a Russian think tank with ties to Wagner even published an opinion poll giving President Nyusi a commanding lead in the run-up to the October 2019 elections.[115]

Despite al-Shabaab/ISCAP–Mozambique's increasingly public affiliation with the Islamic State, and perhaps because of President Nyusi's decision to turn to foreign private military contractors, on one hand, and to downplay the group's relationship with IS Central, on the other, the natural

gas project in Afungi remained attractive to investors. In late September 2019, just as Wagner's men were landing in northern Mozambique, French oil and gas company Total bought Anadarko's 26.5 per cent stake in the gas project for nearly $4 billion, while Japanese, Indian, and other conglomerates owned the remainder, in addition to Mozambique's state-owned oil and gas company.[116] Even though the insurgency continued to escalate, and Maputo turned to foreign mercenaries to help stem the tide, the amount already invested in the Afungi project and its potential earnings appeared to be simply too great for Total to pass up.

The insurgency, however, would quickly dampen whatever optimism might have been raised by President Nyusi's decision to hire Wagner. When Wagner's forces deployed into Cabo Delgado, beginning on October 5, 2019, to bolster Mozambican army positions in rural areas, they quickly learned how capable al-Shabaab/ISCAP–Mozambique had become. Within weeks of landing, eleven members of Wagner were killed in several engagements.[117] In the first attack, only days after Wagner began combat missions, al-Shabaab/ISCAP–Mozambique fighters wearing Mozambican military uniforms infiltrated a Mozambican army base in Mitope, the same village attacked in June 2019, managing to kill one Wagner mercenary before being repelled.[118] In another attack in Muidumbe district on October 27, 2019, the insurgents set up a roadblock and ambushed vehicles carrying Mozambican army and Wagner personnel. Four Wagner mercenaries were shot dead and then beheaded, while a fifth mercenary later died of wounds at the hospital.[119]

Having significantly underbid South African competitors,[120] Wagner proved unable to seriously halt al-Shabaab/ISCAP–Mozambique's momentum. Licking its wounds, and clearly having underestimated the scale of the threat, Wagner quickly withdrew its personnel from combat areas,[121] and eventually withdrew from Mozambique entirely. The Islamic State's Central Africa Province in Mozambique had not only proven impossible for Mozambican security forces to contain, but had also effectively bested a key component of Russian foreign policy in Africa, and put a stop to the Mozambican government's first attempt at bolstering its counterinsurgency effort through foreign intervention.

What then was the relationship between ISCAP–Mozambique and IS Central? By late 2019, evidence of the relationship remained far more

minimal than for other affiliates on the continent, though it was clear that the two had developed a significant flow of communications. Media releases provided the best illustration of the developing relationship: ISCAP Mozambique consistently relayed reports, photos and videos to IS media teams for publication. But the depth of financial and advisory links, and the level of integration into the Islamic State's broader global network, remained far more uncertain. By late 2019, there were no reports of significant financial transfers, as there had been in Congo, Libya, Sinai, or West Africa. Nor had there been reports of IS Central sending envoys to Mozambique, not to mention the kinds of tactical advisors sent from Libya to bolster the military capabilities of ISWAP in Nigeria.[122] Of all the affiliates in Africa, the relationship between IS Central and its new Central African Province wing in Mozambique remained the least clear, seemingly limited to a pledge of allegiance and subsequent media distribution.

In many ways, ISCAP–Mozambique thus illustrated the profound "sovereignty" of the Islamic State's late-stage "subordinate" organizations on the continent. While recognized as part of the Islamic State, Mozambique's insurgency outwardly remained operationally independent, with local circumstances dictating its activities, and at least up to the death of al-Baghdadi, there was no real apparent change in the group's behavior following its incorporation as an IS province. Nor, given the relative opacity of al-Shabaab's local leadership, was it clear if any degree of internal legitimacy had been given to al-Shabaab/ISCAP–Mozambique's leadership through its pledge to IS Central. ISCAP–Mozambique's trajectory following the first IS attack claim in June 2019 remained in the ascendant, but it had already been so, and there was no apparent change in capacity through injections of financial support or other assistance from IS Central. The group appeared enthusiastic in its new identity as part of the Islamic State, regularly communicating with its core institutions. But its own fortunes had been, up to that point, guided entirely by its own capabilities and resources, and it seemed neither helped nor hurt by being part of a global jihadist movement.

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The Islamic State's Central Africa Province at the Time of al-Baghdadi's Death

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Mozambique
October 2019

By the time of al-Baghdadi's death in late October 2019, what had begun as a relatively small movement of religious radicals, isolated from mainstream, government-backed Muslim organizations in a relatively marginal town in northern Mozambique, had, within only two years, become a durable and capable jihadist insurgency operating over thousands of square kilometers. ISCAP–Mozambique's members had killed hundreds of civilians and security force personnel in hundreds of ambushes and assaults throughout the province, and as many as 65,000 people had been displaced.[123] Not only had it managed to sustain itself, grow, and successfully confront the Mozambican military and police, but it had joined the global jihadist movement, however nominally, and forced the withdrawal of a key component of Russian foreign policy in Africa.

Though never in the al-Qaeda orbit, ISCAP–Mozambique experienced the democratization of jihad differently from many of the Islamic State's other African provinces. Given its comparatively late entry into the transnational jihadist movement, its options for global affiliation were effectively already determined: its affiliation to IS Central was not evidence of a move away from al-Qaeda, but rather simply an indication of the contemporary potency of the IS brand and the inclinations of the regional networks into which it had been integrated from the outset.

ISCAP–Mozambique would also be unique in the way it experienced the process of affiliate utility validation: its *bayah* process had occurred in secret, rather than through public pronouncements, and had been effectuated in the context of IS Central's own decline. While specifics of the pledge and acceptance remain unclear, that they occurred at some point is beyond doubt. The post-*bayah* period of subordination emphasized the group's operational sovereignty given its limited practical ties to the Islamic State. This raises the question of why the group would gamble on an affiliation with the Islamic State in exchange for no discernible material benefits or clearly discernable reputational benefits. Nonetheless, following al-Baghdadi's death, al-Shabaab—Islamic State's Central Africa Province in Mozambique—joined nearly every other IS affiliate in the world in

pledging allegiance to the new caliph, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, on November 7, 2019.[124] Operationally "sovereign" it may have been, ISCAP–Mozambique appeared as willing as any other affiliate to reaffirm its subordination to the Islamic State's new leader.

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CONCLUSION

By the end of 2019, the fortunes of the IS Central looked increasingly bleak. After its loss of its last Middle Eastern territory in Baghouz, Syria, in March 2019, the one-time territorial caliphate that the IS Central had reigned over during its apogee had collapsed. Its situation became more dire, though when, in October 2019, US forces killed its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in a raid that seemed to portend the impending demise of the Islamic State's ambitious and deadly project.

Yet in Africa, these dual calamities seemed to matter little. Across the continent, the Islamic State's official provinces and non-province affiliates re-pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi's successor and the Islamic State's new caliph, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi.[1] Of the African provinces to re-pledge allegiance, the Sinai Province was first (November 2, 2019),[2] followed by its Somalia Province (November 3),[3] members from Jund al-Khilafa in Tunisia (November 6),[4] ISWAP[5] and the two ISCAP provinces (November 7),[6] members of the Islamic State in Greater Sahara, now known as the ISWAP in Greater Sahara (November 9),[7] and—after a lag—its one-time juggernaut, the Libya Province (November 15).[8] (Conspicuous by its absence was the Islamic State's Algeria Province, which, according to the best available data, did not re-pledge.) Why, this book has asked, would

the Islamic State's African provinces re-pledge their allegiance to a global parent group so clearly on the decline?

As the preceding case studies from the nine most prominent IS organizations in Africa have shown, the provinces re-pledged allegiance precisely because the benefits that they had received by becoming official IS provinces—or non-province affiliates, in the case of Tunisia—remained intact, even though IS Central itself faltered. This book has shown these logics by investigating three periods (the pre-*bayah* period, the *bayah* period, and the post-*bayah* period) in the life cycles of nine eventual IS groups, and in each explained the experiences of groups with the introduction of three new terms corresponding to each of the time periods: the democratization of jihad, affiliate utility validation, and sovereign subordinates. In pairing these life cycle moments with new analytical terms, we sought to show how, when, where, and why IS affiliates emerged on the continent; the processes by which they sought to become official provinces of the IS Central; and how, once becoming official satellites, their relationships with IS Central did or did not impact their individual evolution. Below, we summarize our primary findings.

The Islamic State in Africa and the Democratization of Jihad

One of the three foundational terms employed in this book was the "democratization of jihad," which refers to the process by which the global emergence of IS Central created an alternative node of global jihadi power to al-Qaeda, which had previously been unilaterally dominant. With the emergence of a new, bipolar global jihadi geopolitical sphere, entire jihadi groups, as well as entrepreneurial, breakaway individual jihadis, were thus afforded a new parent group with which to ally themselves. These new possibilities meant that groups and individuals could seek new modes of alliance with the Islamic State if they were either displeased with their current relationship with al-Qaeda or if their group had never formalized a relationship with al-Qaeda though members desired to have a global brand attachment. In addition to creating a new parent group with which to ally, the emergence of IS Central allowed groups and individuals to leverage their affiliation with one group off the other, creating new fissures, fusions, and, generally, possibilities for power accrual. The benefits that these local jihadi organizations expected to gain from such an affiliation were either

material (funding, arms, fighters, knowledge transfer) or ideological (theological or reputational legitimacy).

Recalling the Islamic State's Democratization of Jihad in Africa

On the African continent, the process of the democratization of jihad happened in nearly every location where IS *wilayat* emerged or attempted to emerge, as the Islamic State attracted new provinces from groups or individuals that previously had formally or informally associated with al-Qaeda. In Libya, IS Central's global rise allowed more hardline Islamists associated with the al-Qaeda-sympathetic Ansar al-Sharia Libya (ASL) to attain local affiliation in a messy political landscape dominated by jockeying Islamist and secular militias. In Algeria, the birthplace of AQIM, the otherwise al-Qaeda-dominated insurgent landscape was democratized when ambitious defectors opted to abandon their affiliation with al-Qaeda for a new global network that seemingly offered more legitimacy and the potential for reinvigorating a struggling insurgency. In Sinai, members of Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM), an al-Qaeda-sympathetic group, found that once counterterrorism efforts had eliminated their pro-al-Qaeda senior leadership, relevance could be found in the IS brand, which offered the fledgling group assistance, and which simultaneously courted them to join it. In Tunisia, the democratization of jihad was equally sharp: KUBN, itself created explicitly by AQIM leadership as a safe haven, served as the source for what would later be Tunisia's IS-sympathetic "soldiers of the Caliphate," Jund al-Khilafa, who defected from their al-Qaeda branch after many of their members had developed affinities for IS after fighting alongside it in Syria.

The democratization of jihad occurred in similar ways throughout Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa. In the case of the Islamic State's West Africa Province, the Islamic State's global rise offered Boko Haram—which, despite dialogue with AQIM years before, had never become an official affiliate—opportunities for new global visibility without the burden of its fraught history with the Sahara's preeminent jihadi group. Similarly, the Islamic State's global rise facilitated new opportunities for Boko Haram's internal dissidents, who saw in the emergence of an alternative global jihadi brand a means of reining in their intransigent leader, Abubakar Shekau. In the case of the ISWAP–Greater Sahara, the rise of the Islamic

State offered an alternative pole of power for Abu Adnan al-Sahraoui, himself an aspirant jihadi leader who had never succeeded in gaining the top leadership position in any group. Likewise, in the al-Qaeda-dominated landscape of Somalia, the rise of the Islamic State served to democratize the jihadi landscape, which had been dominated by al-Shabaab, and also offered an aspirant jihadi ideologue, Abdulqadir Mumin, the chance to break away from the al-Qaeda orbit and form a group of his own. In two cases, however, the Islamic State's democratization of jihad in Africa played out differently: in the two wings of the Islamic State's Central Africa Province. Here, insurgent groups from DRC and Mozambique—neither of which was ever embedded within al-Qaeda-rife areas—simply found the Islamic State's global brand a more useful vehicle than al-Qaeda.

Implications of the Islamic State's Democratization of Jihad in Africa

What are the lessons to be learned from this democratization of jihad? First, and most broadly, the democratization concerned as much the diversification of access to power as the theological diversification of jihad which had already been undertaken on the ground. In other words, though the Islamic State certainly did offer somewhat different theological, tactical, and strategic outlooks from al-Qaeda, in the end, democratization was related far more to the accrual of power than to new existential frames with which to see, interpret, and interact with the world. Put simply, the business of waging jihad—and the creation of an infrastructure of fighters, funders, allies, and adversaries—is a strategic choice for the capture of material or reputational wealth.[9] To pledge allegiance to the Islamic State, we suggest, was more often than not a means to that end: more than offering choices in theological orientation, it offered choices in access to power. Here, a passage by Anouar Boukhars, on why so many rebel groups in the Sahel elect to wage Salafi jihad as a "tool of insurgency"—as opposed to waging a secular insurgency—is worth quoting at length:

> Since Algerian terror groups relocated to Northern Mali in the early 2000s, rebel leaders evolving in the Sahel have become more inclined towards adopting Salafi jihadism as a means to survive, recruit, and outcompete other contending armed actors. This is a strategic choice, which is more informed by strategic conditions on

> the ground than by automatic commitments to a core set of extreme beliefs. In other words, rebel entrepreneurs and their rank-and-file supporters and sympathizers do not have to be die-hard ideologues, or violent religious extremists, to lead or buy into transnational or local groups defined by a radical ideological platform. They just need to think that their choice would yield dividends in contexts of deeply polarized societies that are run by illegitimate, abusive states … the adoption of Salafi jihadism by both insurgent leaders and their rank-and-file supporters is a strategic choice aimed at gaining perceived competitive advantages.[10]

Second, given the emergence of IS *wilayat* in places that were already somewhat or heavily al-Qaeda-dominated, observers should expect that any future IS groups will likely emerge where there is an existing al-Qaeda presence. This recognition highlights another point: the strongest and most viable IS provinces have emerged not where members of pre-existing, official al-Qaeda branches (AQIM and al-Shabaab) renounced their affiliation with al-Qaeda and pledged allegiance. Instead, they emerged from places where groups had considered an al-Qaeda affiliation, were sympathetic to al-Qaeda, or were aligned with al-Qaeda, but never actually became formal, sustained branches. This was the case for Ansar al-Sharia in Libya, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis in Sinai, and Boko Haram in Lake Chad. Conversely, for places that had official, pre-existing al-Qaeda branches, IS cells emerged when dissidents within al-Qaeda-pledged groups broke away to form new IS cells. This was the case for the defection of Gouri and al-Asimi from AQIM in Algeria, that of KUBN (AQIM) in Tunisia, of al-Sahraoui from al-Mourabitoun (AQIM) in the Sahel, and of Mumin from al-Shabaab (AQ East Africa) in Somalia. Finally, it is important to make clear that none of the official al-Qaeda affiliate branches (namely, AQIM and al-Shabaab) ever pledged, as a group, to IS Central.

Third, the democratization of jihad in the African continent has produced no unitary set of relationships between new IS groups and pre-existing al-Qaeda-aligned groups. In some cases, the emergence of the IS offshoot has caused great ire among local al-Qaeda branches, as happened with the Islamic State in Somalia, whose members became targeted and hunted by al-Shabaab. In other cases, the emergence of new IS offshoots was approached non-antagonistically (at least for some time) by pre-

existing al-Qaeda-affiliated groups: in some cases, new IS groups occasionally collaborated with al-Qaeda-aligned actors, as in the case of the ISWAP–Greater Sahara, which, at points in its history, undertook joint attacks with members of JNIM (an AQIM affiliate) before violence between them broke out in July 2019.[11] In other in stances, as in Sinai, groups worked with non-al-Qaeda entities like Hamas before experiencing a deterioration in relations,[12] and also clashing with Jund al-Islam, another al-Qaeda-affiliated group in its area of operations.[13]

Fourth, the Islamic State's rise also created new market competition in the global jihadi space, showing that the constraints that al-Qaeda Core faced were, to a degree, products of its own making. Put differently, the Islamic State showed that, more than being just an alternative to al-Qaeda, it was, in many ways, offering a brand that was, at least to many making strategic calculations about their global alliances, superior to al-Qaeda's. Among other benefits that local African organizations tended to perceive were the Islamic State's awestriking territorial gains, especially from 2014 to 2016; its superior media production values as compared to al-Qaeda; and its more ambitious, contemporary approach to the creation of a caliphate as compared with al-Qaeda. As a result, al-Qaeda has attempted to respond to the emergence of such global jihadi market forces, working to improve its own brand in tangible though generally marginal ways, improving its approach to media, for example.

Fifth, just as the Islamic State democratized the global jihadi landscape, so too the emergence of a new, third global jihadi parent group may serve to democratize it even further. Some hints of this dynamic have emerged in Nigeria, where ISWAP's first leader, Abubakar Shekau—having been removed from ISWAP's leadership role and having split off to lead his JAS splinter—has attempted to expand his new group's influence through his own franchising project, albeit one limited to northern Nigeria rather than one with a global reach.[14] Indeed, so much of the Islamic State's credibility relative to that of al-Qaeda—and thus its ability to secure global affiliates—came from its ability to hold and govern territory in the heart of the Middle East, something al-Qaeda could never claim. While the relative autonomy of the Islamic State's affiliates has insulated them from the material losses suffered by the parent body in its core territory, it is plausible that further negative reputational impacts could create an opportunity for new

international networks to attempt to fill that void. Just as IS supplanted al-Qaeda by appearing to offer something more, a new competitor could very well supplant IS (and al-Qaeda) should it be able to fill the material and reputational vacuum left by the Islamic State's own perceived weakness.

The Islamic State in Africa and Affiliate Utility Validation

The second term informing this book was the notion of "affiliate utility validation." Broadly, it refers to the process by which local jihadi groups seeking to become official provinces, or *wilayat*, of the Islamic State, need to prove their utility, or usefulness, to that body. As we showed, what counted as sufficiently "useful" to the IS Central would change over time, and, moreover, given those changing metrics and the varying capabilities of pledging groups themselves, the waiting time from pledge to acceptance—when acceptance occurred at all—often varied dramatically among the would-be affiliates.

Recalling the Islamic State's Affiliate Utility Validation in Africa

The preceding chapters have shown that once the jihadi landscape was "democ-ratized," local African jihadi groups had varying experiences in their bids to become official IS provinces in a process that we refer to as affiliate utility validation.

In Libya, members of Ansar al-Sharia Libya joined with Libyan foreign fighters from the Battar Brigade returning from Syria, and, after forming a new group, the Islamic Shura Youth Council, based in Derna, pledged allegiance to IS Central. Given the connections with fighters, Libya's historical connections with transnational jihadist circles, and the post-Qaddafi landscape ripe for exploitation, Libya's ability to achieve affiliate utility validation was unquestioned: IS Central granted the status of *wilaya* not only to the Derna cell, but also to two other Libyan provinces as well. For Libya, the process of affiliate utility validation was particularly easy, precisely because IS Central had already sent emissaries there to help establish the *wilayat*.

In Algeria, pledges of *bayat* to IS Central were accepted relatively quickly, after only two months—in no small part because Gouri's faction had pledged allegiance soon after the announcement of the caliphate. For IS

Central, itself newly announced and desirous of demonstrating a global reach and salience, the pledges from Algeria rapidly met the threshold for what it considered proof of utility, we suggest, in large part owing to the high-profile execution of the Frenchman Gourdel. While Algeria ultimately became an unmitigated failure as an IS province—its core group and its successors were quickly destroyed until new cells simply ceased emerging—at the time when it pledged, it met the criteria for affiliate utility validation, which were then laxer than in later years.

In Sinai, the pledge of allegiance from members of ABM was quickly accepted, in the quickest example of affiliate utility validation on the continent, a mere three days after being offered, along with pledges in Libya and Algeria. That ABM's pledge would be accepted was wholly unsurprising: ABM's previous activities between 2011 and 2014 had shown its mettle, and IS Central had itself encouraged ABM members to pledge allegiance. Along with those of Libya and Algeria, Sinai's pledge of *bayah* showed evidence of coordination with IS Central.

In Tunisia, the process of affiliate utility validation was never fully achieved after breakaway, pro-IS soldiers from an AQIM branch in Tunisia, KUBN, pledged allegiance to IS Central. Perhaps because of the small size of the group, its presumed lack of capacity, or IS Central's increased discernment in selecting affiliates, the Jund al-Khilafa never succeeded in gaining official promotion to *wilaya* status. One may, however, wonder whether simply being acknowledged by IS Central was itself sufficient "branding."

In contrast to Tunisia, Boko Haram's pledge to IS Central was received quickly and enthusiastically, after only five days, another rapid example of affiliate utility validation. Again, after months of mimicry of the IS Central, it was not surprising that Boko Haram's pledge was ultimately accepted. At the moment of its pledge, Boko Haram had already shown itself capable of wide-scale military operations, controlling territory, and, in general, serving as a highly valuable acquisition; it had also clearly been in communication previously with IS Central. So too its quick affiliate utility validation process suggested significant pre-pledge coordination.

The case of ISWAP–Greater Sahara is perhaps one of the most illuminating instances of an African affiliate's attempted—and significantly delayed—effort to become an official IS *wilaya*. When al-Sahraoui pledged allegiance to IS Central in May 2015, the pledge went unanswered for

nearly seventeen months. It was only after a series of high-profile attacks in October and November 2016—the point at which its proof of utility to IS Central may be said to have emerged—that it was ultimately acknowledged, though it never received the full status of *wilaya*. Instead, it would take three years and ten months until, in March 2019, soldiers of ISGS were referred to as part of the Islamic State's West Africa Province. Despite proving its utility—and capacity for violence—ISWAP–Greater Sahara would, by late 2019, still not become a *wilaya* on its own but instead remained a branch of ISWAP.

Like ISGS, the Islamic State in Somalia also played a long game when it came to the process of affiliate utility validation. When IS Central sought to establish a branch in Somalia, it preferred a wholesale pledge from al-Qaeda-aligned al-Shabaab. What it got instead was a pledge from Abdulqadir Mumin, an al-Shabaab ideologue based outside al-Shabaab's primary areas of operations. Thus, though the IS Central would acknowledge Mumin's pledge after only several months, it would also make him and his group wait for nearly three years until becoming an official IS province.

Perhaps most revealing of the shifts in how IS Central conceived of "affiliate utility validation," was the experience of the Islamic State's Central Africa Province. While the Islamic State's newest affiliates on the continent, ISCAP–DRC and ISCAP–Mozambique, had both been building limited ties with the IS Central for nearly a year prior to their formal recognition, the timing of that recognition reflected dramatic changes in the fortunes of IS Central. Following the loss of the last piece of its "territorial caliphate" in Syria, IS Central's own reputational vulnerability led it to look beyond areas already connected with the transnational jihadi network. Interestingly, in the case of both wings of ISCAP—in the DRC and Mozambique—the actual dates of *bayat* remain unknown.

Implications of the Islamic State's Affiliate Utility Validation in Africa

As we have already noted, affiliates often had significantly different experiences in proving their utility, given that IS Central's own criteria for what constituted "utility" ebbed and flowed over time. Much as al-Qaeda transitioned from a clandestine international network of terrorist cells into a global network of local insurgencies, the Islamic State called for and

received pledges of allegiance from local insurgencies almost immediately after the announcement of the caliphate in June 2014, transitioning from being a local insurgency itself into a hub of local insurgencies around the world. The creation of its first three African *wilayat* in Libya, Algeria, and Sinai came in one sweep of acceptances in November 2014. With that action, it named aspirant members as full-fledged *wilayat* with seemingly little regard for their capacity or durability, giving small groups like Algeria co-equal status with much more powerful, durable organizations like those in Libya and Sinai. After witnessing, however briefly, these affiliates' varied trajectories—perhaps most glaringly, the swift suppression of its Algerian affiliate—IS Central seemingly decided to rethink its franchising strategy. Throughout 2015 and 2016, we suggest, IS Central's standards had become more stringent: while Boko Haram received *wilaya* status, Tunisia, Somalia, and the eventual ISWAP–GS did not, even though they also seemed durable and capable local insurgencies. By summer 2016, no new province had been announced by the Islamic State in over a year, despite multiple local insurgent groups pledging allegiance and the Islamic State claiming their attacks as its own. Following an earlier period in which foreign insurgencies were declared as *wilayat* and then suffered heavy attrition or simply failed to implement the kind of governance structures seen in Iraq and Syria, IS Central became far more cautious about designating aspirant affiliates as fully fledged "provinces."[15]

By 2018, IS Central appeared to reconsider yet again what made affiliates "useful." Now it laid great store by the reputational importance of being seen to continue expanding at the very time its core territories were diminishing in size. As it lost territory in Iraq and Syria, and as its media teams came under severe attrition, IS Central both streamlined existing the structures of its *wilayat* in addition to adding new provinces. It consistently referred to Mumin's group in Somalia as a province by August 2018, and by early 2019 it had not only recognized the Greater Sahara group as a wing of ISWAP, but also announced another new *wilaya* in the two-winged Central Africa Province. The first completely new province to be announced after the loss of IS Central's last piece of core territory in Baghouz, ISCAP was composed of two durable insurgencies whose profiles differed significantly from other affiliates; neither had any demonstrable relationship with al-Qaeda or its affiliates prior to pledging allegiance to the Islamic State. Both branches of ISCAP had been known and studied but were rarely seen as

having the potential of becoming transnationally affiliated jihadist groups: this demonstrates IS Central's willingness to look beyond the typical profile of local insurgencies that had either been components of al-Qaeda affiliates or otherwise flirted with al-Qaeda's networks. As we suggest, IS Central's own decline had clearly forced its leadership to rethink and reorganize its global affiliate structure, prioritizing expansion of its global footprint in the wake of territorial defeat in its core territories.

Beyond the existence of these two interrelated points—the varying experiences of pledging organizations and the mutable standards for acceptance—there are numerous other implications to be learned from the *bayah* period. We begin by noting some descriptive trends. First, it useful to recognize, in broad terms, that IS Central received and ultimately accepted pledges from north to south, initially gaining the most traction in North Africa (Libya, Algeria, and Egypt) (2014) and Tunisia (2015), before finding adherents in the Sahara and Sahel (Nigeria, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso) (2015) and, then, in east and southern Africa (Somalia, DRC, and Mozambique) (2015–19).

Second, during the *bayah* periods, the IS Central received pledges of allegiance from two types of entities. The first were whole group pledges, in which entire, pre-existing jihadi groups pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. This occurred with the Islamic Shura Youth Council in Libya, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis in Egypt, Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Allied Democratic Forces in eastern Congo, and al-Shabaab in Mozambique. Each of these groups may have been sympathetic to al-Qaeda but were never officially its branches or had not previously had any known associations with al-Qaeda, but gauged the Islamic State to be the preferable "node" with which to first affiliate within the transnational jihadist movement. Never, it is important to note, did IS receive a whole group pledge from an existing al-Qaeda branch. The second type of pledge that IS Central received was from breakaway factions from insurgent groups in Africa, when renegade commanders and units defected from pre-existing al-Qaeda-affiliated groups and, often with a limited number of supporters, pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. This occurred with Abdelmalek Gouri's defection from AQIM in Algeria, the pledges from soldiers from KUBN in Tunisia, Abu Adnan al-Sahraoui's defection from al-Mourabitoun to form the Islamic State in Greater Sahara, and Abdulqadir Mumin's breakaway from al-Shabaab to form the Islamic State in Somalia.[16]

Third, across regions and pledge types, we seek to make clear that a diversity of rationales lay behind why groups or individuals sought affiliate utility validation at all. Some pledging groups, particularly those like the Islamic Shura Youth Council in Libya, whose predecessor members in Ansar al-Sharia in Libya had already been undertaking *dawa* activities for years prior, found theological relevance in the Islamic State's new brand. For others, like Abubakar Shekau's Boko Haram, pressure from members within his own group—eager to leverage a global affiliation to tame Shekau—appeared to be the motor. For still others, like Ansar Beit al-Maqdis and the ADF, their group's own weakness in the face of leadership losses and counterterrorism campaigns proved to be the impetus. In the case of breakaway leaders, like Gouri and al-Asimi (Algeria), al-Sahraoui (ISWAP–Greater Sahara), and Mumin (Somalia), the opportunity to adopt the branding and endorsement of the Islamic State offered a chance for personal advancement after chafing at what they perceived as unjust ceilings within those pre-existing militant groups: when upward mobility was no longer possible, defection became attractive. In other cases, like al-Shabaab in Mozambique, just what rationales motivated the group to pledge remain less clear. We have also seen that pledges, when they came, were often contentious affairs within groups. In many cases, not all members agreed with the *bayah* (as in ABM in Sinai), and, in other cases, the mere offering of *bayah* itself by a member of the group was said by other, senior members not to represent the group as a whole (as in ISWAP–Greater Sahara).

Beyond these specific trends, our studies of the *bayah* periods have also led to new insights into the broader processes of global jihadist franchising. Fourth, once a local group succeeds in being recognized as part of a global jihadi brand, both core and affiliate may be thought of as being engaged in a version of "global jihadi branding entrapment." This refers to the process whereby a would-be affiliate of a global jihadi group pledges allegiance to that parent group, most often in the hope of gaining recognition or branding as a province (in the case of IS) or branch (in the case of al-Qaeda). While gaining such a branding distinction is not necessarily easily done, once accomplished (via affiliate utility validation), the affiliate has essentially "entrapped" the core. Once designated as an official "province," affiliates have often proven difficult for IS Central (and al-Qaeda Central, with its branches) to manage and to punish, and, in the end, have never had their

official affiliation rescinded. In other words, once a local affiliate's *bayah* is accepted, it is granted a sort of "jihadi tenure," which not only weds the central organization to that affiliate's sometimes undesirous behavior, but also traps the affiliate in the consequences of being part of a group as infamous and targeted as the Islamic State. Not only would IS Central, therefore, be associated with the embarrassing disintegration of Wilayat al-Jazair and the brutal civilian abuses of Abubakar Shekau's ISWAP, but, conversely, affiliates around the continent, especially in Libya, Algeria, Sinai, Congo, and Mozambique, have had new targets placed on them for their affiliation with the Islamic State. This two-sided "branding entrapment" poses challenges for both the parent body and its affiliates, though thus far these challenges have not led to wholesale renunciation by either side.

Fifth, despite the generally inordinate focus—perhaps rightfully so—that has been given to the benefits that global jihadi organizations might accrue from franchising, we suggest that in fact affiliates may get the better end of the deal. Though most African affiliates received generally little in the way of material support from IS Central (especially as the latter saw its fortunes decline), once the IS brand had been captured, it became very important for the affiliates' ability to attract of local fighters, financing, and support, while IS Central was hardly able to oversee or punish them if they misused or abused the brand. When it came to "monitoring" its provinces in Africa, open-source evidence suggests that the IS Central's deployment of envoys has remained limited to occasional representatives and trainers, smuggled to affiliates where possible to formalize ties or provide tactical assistance. No real evidence has emerged of these envoys engaging in any sort of profound or prolonged day-to-day operational direction, with the exception of Libya, where many of the group's commanders and fighters had themselves returned from the Islamic State's core territories in Iraq and Syria. The closest IS Central ever came close to "punishing" an affiliate's leadership was when it simply agreed to the demotion of Shekau at the insistence of his internal rivals, being incapable of imposing punishment from outside ISWAP itself. Finally, while the provinces might receive more benefits than the core, in no cases could we find instances in which African affiliates actually sent funding back to IS Central, as AQIM had reportedly done with funds from al-Qaeda Core.[17] As a result of the tendency for these affiliate provinces to endure once established, there is a degree of province

path dependency: once a province has been established, IS Central has never acknowledged the destruction of recognized affiliates as operational insurgent organizations. Instead, it has either simply ceased to make claims in their name (Algeria) or otherwise consolidated multiple existing provinces into a single province (Libya). In other words, once an IS province exists, it endures, even if "under the hood" there is little in the way of leadership, funding, fighters, or attacks. Wilayat al-Jazair in Algeria is a good case in point.

Sixth, we suggest that the affiliate's degree of "entrapment" of the core seems to be greater than the core's degree of "entrapment" of the affiliate. In other words, local affiliate agents have greater degrees of agency vis-à-vis their parent groups than previously recognized. Whereas the core has various incentives not to disband the affiliate, the rise of the Islamic State's network has established the precedent of affiliates themselves defecting from the core, precisely because the democratization of jihad now offers them alternative nodes of affiliation. Although we have not seen IS provinces in Africa defect from IS Central and pledge allegiance to al-Qaeda, we have seen similar situations occurring in al-Qaeda. The most glaring is, of course, the creation of the Islamic State itself, when an ambitious local affiliate (AQI/ISI) increasingly challenged the authority of the core organization, al-Qaeda, to which it was nominally subordinate, ultimately abandoning it. Eventually, al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra—so central to the story of the AQ–IS split—itself also renounced its ties to al-Qaeda. Both experiences caused immense turmoil for al-Qaeda's central leadership, but its limited ability to enforce its rule on its powerful local affiliates precluded it from preventing either defection. While we have yet to see an entire African IS affiliate defect to become a new branch of another jihadi group, such as al-Qaeda, we have seen this occur in the reverse. Though it has not yet occurred, we might well imagine IS groups defecting to al-Qaeda. While such defections are likely limited by the ideological and theological importance of a *bayah* pledge to a purported caliph rather than more worldly superiors like al-Qaeda's leadership, therein lies an important lesson for an increasingly isolated central IS leadership. It has limited capability to enforce its writ upon its affiliate organizations, and deter confrontations that might make such splits more visible and thus potentially damage perceptions of its authority. Indeed, future research

agendas need to examine more closely the power asymmetries between the core and its affiliates.[18]

Seventh, a review of the process of IS franchising in Africa also suggests that IS Central may have learned some—but not all of the—lessons from al-Qaeda's franchising efforts. First, that the Islamic State quickly accepted pledges from around the world following the declaration of its caliphate in 2014 might be considered an interesting decision, particularly given the difficulties that al-Qaeda faced in managing its own affiliates: as noted, the Islamic State should have been all too aware of the challenges of affiliate management, given that the core group's predecessor, AQI, was a disobedient al-Qaeda breakaway. Yet, given its desire to create a global caliphate—which involved the maintenance of territories—managing challenging affiliates was a risk that it had to take.

One lesson that IS Central did seem to learn from al-Qaeda, at least in Africa, was that it never tried to create African IS *wilayat* wholly from the ground up or, as Colin Clarke has called it elsewhere, through a process of "in-house" expansion: that is, trying to start a cell from scratch in new places, to the general exclusion of local actors. Indeed, al-Qaeda's attempt to establish such an "in-house" affiliate in Saudi Arabia in 2003 was largely a failure.[19] The only instance in which the Islamic State might be said to have worked to set up an African *wilaya* of its own occurred in Libya, though there Islamic State had directed Libyan actors to return to their country to recruit and organize existing local groups.

A final lesson that IS Central learned about franchising from al-Qaeda was that, as IS Central itself declined, it could use its affiliates to pick up the reputational slack. In the case of al-Qaeda, for instance, when the core group proved itself unable to undertake a large-scale attack on the West post-9/11, its affiliate province, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen, took up where it had left off, managing several infamous "near misses."[20] Such attacks as the deployment of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the so-called underwear bomber in 2009, the attempted Times Square bombing in 2010, and the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris in 2015[21] sought to retain al-Qaeda's tempo of operations against the "far enemy," which had for much of its existence been its primary target. As IS Central declined with the loss of Baghouz and al-Baghdadi's death, IS provinces have also taken up the mantle by combating their own "near enemy." Daniel Milton,

for instance, has shown that a disproportionate number of IS Central photo propaganda reports came from the affiliates—not from the central organization—once it began to lose its territory.[22] Likewise, IS Central widely touted the violence of its African affiliates as it was losing its last piece of territory in Syria. In other words, the affiliate provinces served as examples of success—and, indeed, as distractions from its losses—when the core group was in decline.

The Islamic State in Africa and Sovereign Subordinates

To recall, the third term we have introduced to help understand the IS experience on the continent is "sovereign subordinates." By this, we are referring to the status of the Islamic State's African *wilayat* vis-à-vis the parent body. The term "sovereign subordinates" is an intentional juxtaposition, suggesting, on one hand, being subordinate (or beholden to the wishes of a more powerful actor) while, on the other hand, being sovereign (or having the capacity and authority to undertake actions at will). In the case of the Islamic State's African *wilayat*, we suggest that their experience was generally one of sovereign subordination: they were ostensibly agents of IS Central, though in reality they operated largely independently of any substantial coordination, direction, or extensive demands from it, at least when viewed from the open-source domain.

Recalling the Islamic State's Sovereign Subordinates in Africa

Once having achieved affiliate utility validation, individual IS groups enjoyed varying degrees of connection with IS Central, and, indeed, there was no uniform relationship between the two. In this respect, however, the Islamic State's Libya provinces were unique. While it is certainly inaccurate to claim that the Libyan provinces were ever fully subordinate to IS Central, they did appear to receive more assistance and be more integrated than any other African province. Not only had certain founding members of IS cells in Derna and Sirte actually served as part of the Battar Brigade, but IS Central also played a much more profound role in the establishment of its *wilayat* in Libya than anywhere else on the continent. By maintaining communications, and sending envoys, and even governors, as well as presumed financial transfers, IS Central was far more involved in the

operations and administration of its Libyan cells than in other African provinces. Yet, while it was eager to set up the provinces in Libya, once more intense counterterror pressure against its three Libyan *wilayat* began, IS Central seemingly offered little assistance to help stop the tide of their decline, not least because it was itself targeted.

In Algeria, Wilayat al-Jazair was always known to have an extremely limited relationship with the IS Central: never was there any meaningful connection between the two. While Wilayat al-Jazair could gain the IS brand without much effort, that affiliation brought immense costs for the group when it incurred fatal pressure from the Algerian state. As this pressure mounted, Wilayat al-Jazair would receive no discernible assistance from its assumed parent organization.

In Sinai, the Islamic State's province there did indeed receive some assistance from IS Central, particularly in its earlier days. Indeed, available evidence seems to suggest that—somewhat ironically—the deepest integration occurred before the group was an official *wilaya*, with IS Central sending envoys, money, and weapons, coordinating attacks with members of ABM, and facilitating linkages between Sinai and Libya. After this early period of assistance, however, IS Central's attraction seemed to wane over time. Though IS–Sinai remained inspired by and often mimicked features of IS Central's approaches—attempting to hold territory, exploiting sectarian divisions, and targeting civilians more than its predecessor group had—it remained, as far as can be seen, functionally autonomous.

Tunisia's seeming independence from IS Central was also clear. Although the IS Central's media apparatus would repeatedly claim attacks conducted by fighters in Tunisia, its soldiers, the Jund al-Khilafa, largely acted on their own accord or with assistance from IS cells in Sabratha, Libya. Receiving no apparent direction or funding from IS Central and, indeed, having never enjoyed affiliate utility validation in the first place, Tunisia's aspirant affiliate never really had the chance to become a sovereign subordinate at all.

In the case of the West Africa Province, the IS Central was comparatively deeply involved, though intermittently. Particularly following what seems to have been a courting period, which saw it aid in the setting up of ISWAP's media operations in early 2015, IS Central agreed to and publicized the replacement of Shekau with al-Barnawi. Afterwards, IS Central seems to have stepped in to help its affiliate, allegedly offering a

blueprint for its post-Shekau development, injecting significant amounts of money at regular intervals, facilitating training with Libyan IS members, and potentially brokering peace between ISWAP and Shekau's JAS. Other instances occurred of communication, tactical and operational training, and personnel movement, in addition to continued cooperation in the media realm. And yet, for all these clear examples of coordination, IS Central can at no time be said to have controlled or directed the group. In the same ways as other provinces, ISWAP remained driven by local exigencies.

For ISWAP–Greater Sahara, its relationship with IS Central was one of highly sovereign independence. It had never achieved the status of an official *wilaya* until it was referred to by IS Central as part of ISWAP, and its leaders had no visible signs of connection with the IS Central: even the IS media apparatus, which had historically been the main link between African affiliates and the core, mostly ignored ISGS for much of its life cycle. Yet, as its violent profile rose, the IS Central carried out a degree of at least bureaucratic intervention, subsuming it as a satellite branch of its ISWAP province, and eventually claiming attacks in its name.

In the case of the Islamic State in Somalia, go-it-alone sovereignty, and not top-down subordination, typified the group's relationship with IS Central. Though IS Central sought a branch in Somalia, its inability to get a wholesale pledge from al-Shabaab meant that its consolation prize—the allegiance of a small, remote branch led by Abdulqadir Mumin—never amounted to a high priority. Though there is evidence of money transfers and training following IS–Somalia's pledge, nothing is known of collaboration between the two subsequently, apart from the IS Central publicizing attacks by the soldiers of the affiliate, prior its bureaucratic intervention in mid-2018, by which time it was consistently referring to Somalia as a *wilaya*.

Even by the time that the Central Africa Province in eastern Congo was formally recognized in April 2019, IS Central was still capable of providing the early financial and directional assistance offered to other affiliates, sending money and envoys to cement the relationship. While the remoteness of the former ADF's area of operation likely made such assistance more challenging for IS Central, its interest in enticing the ADF with new flows of resources was clear. Nonetheless, the former ADF's remoteness also ensured its operational sovereignty, even as its leader, Musa Baluku, enthusiastically adopted his role as a subordinate to the

caliph, a position conferring immense legitimacy upon Baluku within the group.

While the relationship between IS Central and the ISCAP branch in Mozambique remains far less understood—with no clear evidence of financial transfers or envoys from the parent group to the affiliate—this perhaps illustrates how the affiliate in Mozambique is among the most sovereign of all the subordinates in Africa. While seemingly benefiting from the reputational value of being part of an IS province, the insurgency in Cabo Delgado relies on local and regional recruitment networks and financial resources, and no evidence exists of tactical direction from IS Central, even when the period following Baghdadi's death saw the group make major military advances.

Implications of the Islamic State's Sovereign Subordinates in Africa

The implications of recognizing the broader experience of IS affiliates in Africa as sovereign subordinates of IS Central are numerous. First, it is important to reemphasize that the Islamic State's African branches have been far more sovereign than subordinate. Without being drawn too far into the "predominantly local vs strongly influenced from abroad" debate,[23] we state simply that, in the case studies under investigation here, all available evidence leads us to recall that local dynamics, far more than global direction, have dictated the contours of the African affiliates' evolution. Stig Hansen reminds us of such debates in the case of al-Shabaab: "Outside observers have either tended to 'localize' or 'globalize' Al-Shabaab. Both views are erroneous."[24] Instead, such groups are hybrid products of their local environments and global influences. Attempting to understand any local insurgent group exclusively or primarily through the lens of its parent jihadi group or exclusively in the context of its local environment presents inherent shortcomings, which we discuss subsequently.

Second, the fact that these groups remained far more sovereign than subordinate does not mean that IS Central was indifferent to what happened within them. At various points in time, our research shows, IS Central has intervened in the internal politics of its African affiliates. Most notably, it appears to have invested significant amounts of time and resources to court groups before they pledged allegiance. This occurred most vividly in the case of ABM in Sinai, Boko Haram in Nigeria, and, unsuccessfully, al-

Shabaab in Somalia. In the former two cases, envoys of respective groups were in motion. In the case of Libya, IS Cen-tral's profound influence in its formation and early management has already been discussed.

As time wore on, IS Central's hold on its affiliates seemed to wane. In addition to early communications, media assistance, and financial and personnel transfers, IS Central would intervene within its African provinces by approving changes in leaders, offering clarification on points of theology, demanding doctrinal changes, initiating knowledge transfers, and coordinating messaging and media production. It has also informed the bureaucratic organization of the provinces themselves. Since 2017, IS Central has also been involved in consolidating its smaller provinces into larger ones. Most notably, it merged the three Libyan *wilayat* into one, while also declaring ISGS a new wing of ISWAP. Moreover, rather than creating ISCAP in the form of two separate provinces—one in DRC and one in Mozambique—it nominally organized them as the Central Africa Province and has reportedly attempted to put them under the authority of Mumin's affiliate in Somalia.[25]

Third, we seek to make a new intervention about how and why affiliation to IS Central matters: we show that although the activities of African IS affiliates were informed only occasionally by formal requests or demands from IS Central, instead provinces' behaviors were often informed informally by the normative adoption of the IS brand as they sought to mimic what IS Central was doing. This informal mimicry—this IS-like behavior that was not known to be directed by IS Central—has been visible in sundry dimensions. A notable example is attempts at the seizure of territory: in the case of Derna and Sirte Libya in 2014, in Sheikh Zuweid in Sinai in July 2015, in Ben Guerdane in Tunisia in March 2016, in Qandala in northern Somalia in October 2016, and more recently in Mocímboa da Praia in Mozambique in August 2020, affiliates have consistently sought to seize major towns, often choosing to defend them in pitched battles with security forces who were attempting to retake control. Rather than remaining purely guerrilla groups, many affiliates have attempted to mirror the IS Central's own early emphasis on physical control and governance of territory, often choosing to mount large-scale takeovers of towns before being militarily capable of holding them, and thus suffering large casualties in subsequent counterattacks by security forces. This is an important indication of the influence of the Islamic State on affiliate behavior: in

repeated instances, affiliates have chosen to undertake military operations that match the propaganda objectives of IS Central, but leave them exposed to devastating counter-offensives. Elsewhere, other examples of informal mimicry of IS Central include changes in affiliates' targets, including increased attacks on civilians and minority sects, the tactical use of beheading, and the grisly propaganda videos made so infamous by IS Central. Less egregious forms of mimicry have been seen with local affiliates' documentation of *dawa* outreach, as well as attempts at managing community relations.

Fourth, as a result of their marked degree of sovereignty, IS groups in Africa had widely varying experiences: as we have seen, there is no "unifying" experience of what it means to be an IS affiliate on the continent. As regards the number of militants fielded by each affiliate, these range from ISWAP's 3,500 fighters in the Lake Chad Basin to the IS cells in Algeria, each of which likely comprised scarcely more than 50 fighters at any given time. On the theme of variation, it has been shown that some cells emerged and "flourished" (as in the case of the IS–Libya, IS–Sinai, and ISWAP) while others were quickly stamped out or proved too weak to be viable (IS–Algeria). For others, their initial emergence was slow, but over time they have become more powerful, such as ISWAP–Greater Sahara, and ISCAP–Mozambique. Some IS groups in Africa tended to target Sufis, Jews, and Christians (IS–Sinai), while others were more focused, to varying degrees, on fighting counterterror forces (ISWAP), the police (IS–Tunisia, IS–Algeria), or directly establishing physical control of territory and governance structures (IS–Libya). Certain ones had unique targets like the aviation industry (IS–Sinai) or the oil and gas industry (Libya). Some IS groups attempted to hold and govern territory (like IS–Libya, IS–Somalia, ISWAP) while others were never much more than underground, mostly clandestine cells (Algeria and Tunisia). Still others engaged in substantial combat with other local al-Qaeda-affiliated groups (like IS–Somalia, which has often fought al-Shabaab), even while other IS organizations at times actively collaborated with al-Qaeda groups in their region (like ISWAP–Greater Sahara). Despite the extreme rhetoric that both al-Qaeda's and the Islamic State's propaganda apparatuses have used when denouncing one another, there are no monolithic relationships between IS and AQ affiliates.[26]

Fifth, despite fears that have seemingly percolated within would-be pledging organizations that an affiliation with a core, global jihadist parent group might overwhelm their local, domestic agendas, these seem not to have materialized on the African continent. While IS Central has always requested that media releases for the provinces go through its channels, affiliates have broadly enjoyed autonomy in their internal affairs, including leadership selection; an overbearing presence could potentially alienate new affiliates whose leaders might be deterred by outside micromanagement. And, as we have emphasized, to be an IS affiliate on the African continent has come with significant flexibility: few restrictions from above mean there has been little concern that local agendas might be overshadowed by global ones. As Robert Feldman has suggested, this lack of an overbearing presence might well be an additional reason why we have yet to see the defection of any IS provinces away from the core.[27]

Sixth, and arguably most importantly, we emphasize that because of the relative autonomy from the core, affiliates' relations with IS Central should not obscure the importance of their local circumstances in their capacity to inflict violence and stage attacks. In the case of Africa, we suggest that it is wrong-headed to attempt to understand and combat any IS-affiliated group exclusively through the lens of its IS affiliation, which can and will lead to ill-informed and counterproductive counterterrorism policies by domestic and international security forces.[28] Simultaneously, it is wrong to assume that just because the Islamic State has branches around the continent, such branches are necessarily more capable or dangerous.[29] Because all African IS affiliate groups (at the moment, at least) are, at their core, locally created and locally rooted, deep understanding of their local context is the better framework for gauging the threats they pose to both local communities and the wider world. These local contexts should be the starting point for an analysis of their actions and goals. While IS affiliation shapes the identity, appeal, and objectives of affiliates, they remain fundamentally local insurgencies whose capacities and limitations are primarily determined by local circumstances.

Given this primacy of local conditions, some observers have questioned the very utility of thinking about the groups discussed in this book as IS affiliates at all: why, they ask, if these groups are so locally rooted, should one think about these insurgencies as IS representatives in Africa? Our response, quite simply, is because they are. To suggest that merely because

IS Central does not have direct command and control of affiliates on the continent or that the membership of those affiliates is local rather than deriving from the core territories does not mean that they are not representatives of the Islamic State. IS Central and its African provinces certainly believe, in other words, in the latter's full standing as local affiliates: provincial status is not contingent on a strong degree of operational integration between core and affiliate. IS affiliation does not describe a particular set of immutable criteria but is rather an ideational connection established between its core leadership and local insurgent leaders to their mutual benefit. Observers who fail to acknowledge that these groups are IS representatives are often unaware that this tangible, flexible, though often loose relationship is precisely what being an IS affiliate entails. The Islamic State has often attempted to standardize these relationships, offering guidance and incentives to local leadership, but the degree to which local affiliates mirror the structure and conduct of the core territories varies widely from group to group: this does not change the fact that local affiliates are recognized by the Islamic State as its provinces. As the authors of a report on Islamic State's Central Africa Province, whose affiliation with the Islamic State has been questioned by some analysts,[30] have written:

> It is misleading to judge the legitimacy of an Islamic State affiliate by whether it essentially looks like the Islamic State in Mosul or Raqqa circa 2014–2015. Whether or not an affiliate adopts the Islamic State's technologies of war used in Iraq and Syria, such as its improvised explosive device (IED) techniques and tactics, is an even more misleading criterion for legitimacy. It is also inaccurate to dismiss an affiliate if its relationship with the Islamic State is different to other formally accepted affiliates. Given the fluctuations of this recent history, the critical criterion for whether a group is formally a province of the Islamic State is whether it has been officially declared so by the Islamic State. Of course, this is not necessarily indicative of the nature of the relationship between the Islamic State and its various affiliates. For example, being a formal affiliate does not necessarily mean that the Islamic State has overarching direct command and control. However, formal acknowledgement by the Islamic State is likely to indicate the

> satisfaction of most (if not all) the broad criteria outlined earlier and, where the province is active, this will be publicly reinforced if/when the Islamic State's central media units feature the activities of the affiliates in its messaging.[31]

Perhaps most importantly, an analytical lens that places primary focus on local context and conflict drivers must recognize that it is local affiliates themselves who place outsize value on their status as provinces of the Islamic State, which confers legitimacy upon local leaders in addition to varying degrees of material assistance. As the authors of this book have previously said:

> Even though most Islamic State provinces in Africa have not shown evidence of profound direct material support from IS Central, their mere affiliation with the group—serving as Islamic State-branded entities—has tangible impacts on the way in which these groups "move about in the world." As an identity marker (however potentially hollow in its practical connective forms), to be an "Islamic State" province in Africa informs patterns of groups' local fighter recruitment; foreign fighter recruitment; training; fundraising; tactics; and attempts at governance. In addition to these impacts on the internal composition and tactics of the groups, the Islamic State brand impacts patterns of local ethnic relations; international relations; counterterrorism pressure against the groups, and potential rivalries and alliances with other jihadi groups in the area of operation. [As] … a marker of identity, it has had an impact on how groups have evolved after fusing their identity with the Islamic State.[32]

Put simply, when both the African group and IS Central declare an African group to be a province, it is so. To deny that the groups are the Islamic State's representatives in Africa—no matter how hollow material or personal ties between affiliates and the core may be in practice—is to misunderstand the very nature of what it means to be an IS province on the continent at all.

* * *

Looking Toward the Future

With this knowledge in hand, how should one interpret the likely futures of specific affiliates of the Islamic State in Africa, and the Islamic State in Africa more broadly, and what might the African experience suggest to us about the future of the Islamic State more globally?

The Future of Individual Islamic State Groups in Africa

We make no predictions about particular IS affiliates' futures in Africa. Given the ever-shifting landscapes and temporally bound nature of this work (2014–19), such assessments would ultimately become quickly outdated even if they were ever correct in the first place. Instead, we simply suggest that the same factors that led to the rise of the Islamic State in various parts of the continent—if such factors endure into the future—will continue to facilitate the presence of IS organizations and sympathizers. Key factors in this regard are citizens' distrust of their states, including the presence of non-representative governance, corruption, military and police brutality, and a lack of provision of social services. To the degree that Islamist rhetoric and actions can serve as fill-ins for African states' inabilities or unwillingness to perform these tasks, and that ethnic or clan cleavages can be fused with religion to address state weakness, we imagine that IS organizations will endure into the future.

Outside the domestic conditions of the states in which IS organizations are embedded, the internal dynamics of IS affiliates themselves will inevitably have a bearing on their own future longevity. IS leaders' ability to maintain internal group coherence, ensure command and control capabilities, recruit new members, secure funding and weapons, ingratiate themselves with local populations, and remain resilient to national and multinational counterterror efforts, will inherently affect their futures. Likewise, their ability to manage relationships with rival (and sometimes non-rival) proximate jihadi groups will also affect their longevity. Finally, to the extent that it ever did, new or increased support from IS Central—which is unlikely, though perhaps possible—could also have a bearing on affiliates' futures.

The Future of the Islamic State in Africa and Globally

While it is foolhardy to attempt to predict the trajectories of each of the nine IS organizations detailed here, we do seek to offer some general, broad trends that we think will be likely. Most generally, we view as very unlikely that IS Central will look to move its "core"—key personnel, assets, and central identity—to Africa, as some had suggested in its earlier days.[33] On one hand, for many reasons—logistical, financial, cultural, and operational—any attempt to move the core of the Islamic State to anywhere on the continent is not probable. Instead, the Islamic State's core leadership is very much likely to remain a primarily Iraqi organization, though one that will, as Katherine Zimmerman has said, "draw strength from successes in Africa" even once it has weakened.[34] On the other hand, however, as we have sought to underline here, the African continent is increasingly being understood as an important new battlefront in the global jihadist movement.

Second, post-2019, we suggest that the current IS affiliates look likely to remain in Africa, and many will expand. From our perspective, there is little reason to believe that the phenomenon of local insurgencies in Africa affiliating themselves with the Islamic State will not continue. Because of continued citizen grievances, inefficacy of counterterror forces, and "localization" of the IS message, the Islamic State's current African groups will most likely endure, at least nominally, into the future. The continuation of these IS provinces in Africa is particularly likely, we suggest, given that even if groups are minimized on the battlefield, the Islamic State's existential ideology is, in essence, "undefeatable," thus allowing these groups to simply go underground.

Third, to the extent that IS groups in Africa will likely endure, we anticipate that their experiences will vary with local security conditions, as some affiliates attempt to seize and govern territory while others remain or transition into clandestine insurgent networks. The degree to which these changes in operational behavior are emphsized in IS media may also reflect IS Central's own fortunes, as its military defeat in Iraq and Syria—and its own transition into insurgent tactics—has led IS Central to de-emphasize its own ability to hold and govern territory, and it may seek it to compensate by highlighting similar activities by other affiliates. Broadly speaking, however, the military and administrative capacity necessary to seize and govern territory and manage large civilian populations will likely remain beyond the grasp and will of most IS affiliates in Africa and, to the extent

that their successes incur counterterrorism responses, may become even more difficult to accomplish.

Fourth, we anticipate that we will see new individuals and groups undertaking violence in the name of the Islamic State around the African continent. For lack of space, this book did not delve into those cases around the continent in which individuals undertook violence in the name of the Islamic State outside the context of a core group of IS fighters. For instance, in South Africa, two high-profile attacks have been undertaken in the name of the Islamic State. In July 2016 two brothers, known as the Thulsie twins, were arrested for conspiracy to commit terror attacks on Jewish and American entities for the Islamic State.[35] Two years later, in February 2018, a couple who hold dual citizenship in both Britain and South Africa were kidnapped by an extremist group linked to ISIS.[36] Likewise, in Kenya, there have been at least two IS-inspired attacks. In the first-ever IS attack in the country, in September 2016, three Kenyan women entered a police station in Mombasa to report a lost cell phone: one woman pulled a knife while another threw a petrol bomb to set the building on fire before all three were shot dead by police. One, it was later found, had been wearing an undetonated suicide vest.[37] Authorities revealed that the attackers had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State,[38] which, through the Amaq news agency, publicized the women's attack.[39] Later, in October 2016, a Kenyan man inspired by the Islamic State stabbed a security guard outside the US Embassy in Nairobi, before being killed. Again, Amaq claimed the attack[40] by one of its "soldiers of the Islamic State."[41] Elsewhere on the continent, in December 2018, a small group of IS-inspired extremists in Morocco tracked and beheaded two Scandinavian hikers in the High Atlas Mountains, though no evidence has ever emerged to suggest that IS Central had coordinated the attacks.[42]

Fifth, we think it is generally unlikely that new *wilayat* will emerge on the continent. Nowhere, from our perspective, is there a likely new critical mass of fighters combined with a sufficiently permissive security environment that might make the increasingly discerning IS Central bestow a *wilaya* status on a group. Places that may be worth watching include Morocco, Mauritania, and Tanzania, though, again, the presence of small, isolated IS-sympathetic individuals in some of these places has not reached the threshold of earning *wilaya* status. For new *wilayat* in Africa to emerge,

there would have to be defections from extant militant groups to the Islamic State, though in most cases these breakaways are far more likely to be rebranded as new members of existing *wilayat* than declared wholesale new affiliates.

When it comes to fighting the Islamic State's presence in Africa, approaches for counterterrorism are outside the scope of our project. However, we strongly suggest that counterterror forces do not over-ascribe importance to the fact that these groups are IS provinces. Put otherwise, though they are the Islamic State's representatives on the ground, to think of these insurgencies only or primarily as IS groups is foolhardy. They are, in most cases, simply local jihadist groups that have adopted a global brand. The degree of threat that they pose should be considered on its own terms, avoiding an overemphasis on their connections with IS Central. Nor has the mere "defeat" or decline of IS Central been shown to be crucial in weakening African affiliates: as we have argued elsewhere, IS Central's *annus horribilis* of 2019 did little to dampen its African provinces' enthusiasm for its brand.[43] As Mokhtar Awad has said in the case of IS–Sinai:

> Jihadist ideology has long existed and will continue to exist in Egypt. The Islamic State was merely a new brand that local jihadists adopted, and they may even adopt a new one in the future. Therefore, it wouldn't be wise for policymakers to look at these groups as merely 'Islamic State affiliates.'[44]

Moreover, we also note simply that although kinetic, violent counterterror measures are arguably necessary for fighting many of these groups, they are far from sufficient. The best outcome is that the IS brand becomes not "defeated" on the continent—an impossible task—but instead "irrelevant": that is, that other organizing ideologies and sources of power become the orienting paradigms for citizens' pursuit of ideal futures. Though the passage of time may itself ultimately lead to its irrelevance or abandonment, the IS brand will endure for the foreseeable future because of its one-time glories, as well as its strategic utility as an organizing ideology for aspirant jihadi leaders to accrue material power and ideological legitimacy. Importantly, though military operations might reduce the number of fighters in any single IS cell, ideology hides in broad daylight.

To the extent that "irrelevance," and not "defeat," should become the goal, Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, the Islamic State's one-time spokesman, encapsulated the sentiment best in a May 2016 recorded message in which he proclaimed: "O America, would we [the Islamic State] be defeated and you be victorious if you were to take Mosul or Sirte or Raqqa? … Certainly not! We would be defeated and you victorious only if you were able to remove the Quran from Muslims' hearts."[45]

Any attempts at combating the IS presence on the continent will have to address the domestic conditions of the state, economy, society, and security that have collectively led to the rise of the IS brand as a useful conduit for the accrual of power. Efforts to address the Islamic State's presence in Africa should be based on a rule of law approach that prioritizes human rights and human dignity, and that treats local communities caught in the midst of IS groups' violence with the utmost respect. Specific measures could include counter-messaging campaigns; providing "off-ramps" for radicalized individuals, particularly in the form of entrepreneurship; engaging in community building and community resilience campaigns; and supporting community policing. In some instances, negotiations might be an option. Conversely, the use of ethnic-based militias as partner forces to combat the groups, we suggest, is rife with potential pitfalls.

Finally, should the global community and national governments look to fight the IS presence on the African continent, we emphasize the point that each affiliate looks different. Given their localized emergence and evolution, there is no "one size fits all" approach to addressing the threats posed by these groups. Nor, despite the focus of this book, do we advocate trying to address these particular affiliates primarily through the lens of their affiliation with the Islamic State. Instead, though the Islamic State has been able to develop a network of provinces, their evolution has been far more a product of their own making than of that of IS Central itself.

NOTES

1. INTRODUCTION

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30. See Jason Warner, Ryan O'Farrell, Héni Nsaibia, and Ryan Cummings, "Outlasting the Caliphate: The Evolution of the Islamic State Threat in Africa," *CTC Sentinel* 13, no. 7 (2020): 18–33.
31. For an outstanding overview of al-Zarqawi's time in prison, see Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS* (New York: Doubleday, 2015); Bryan Price, Daniel Milton, Muhammad al-'Ubaydi, and Nelly Lahoud, *The Group That Calls Itself a State* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2014), 9–14, https://ctc.usma.edu/the-group-that-calls-itself-a-state-understanding-the-evolution-and-challenges-of-the-islamic-state/.

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37. Zack Gold, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI): An al-Qaeda Affiliate Case Study," CNA, October 2017, 4, https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/DIM-2017-U-016118-2Rev.pdf.
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39. We thank Muhammad al-Ubaydi for this point.
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41. "Timeline: The Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State," Wilson Center, October 28, 2019, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state. For a more detailed discussion on the naming conventions of the new group, see Cole Bunzel, "From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State," Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World, Analysis Paper No. 19, March 2015, 17–18, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-ideology-of-the-Islamic-State.pdf.
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43. Gold, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI): An al-Qaeda Affiliate Case Study."
44. As quoted in ibid., 21.

45. "Timeline: The Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State."
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47. As the Wilson Center writes, "By early 2008, 2,400 ISI members had been killed and 8,800 were captured, out of a previous membership of 15,000. The flow of foreign fighters into Iraq decreases from 120 per month to five or six per month by 2009." See "Timeline: The Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State."
48. See Price et al., *The Group That Calls Itself a State*, 8–27.
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54. Price et al., *The Group That Calls Itself a State*, 4.
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99. "How the Islamic State Rose, Fell and Could Rise Again in the Maghreb," International Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report No. 178, July 24, 2017, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/178-how-islamic-state-rose-fell-and-could-rise-again-maghreb.
100. In thinking about terrorist alliances, Tricia Bacon has conceived a distinct but somewhat similar typology, considering terrorist groups' progression through the stages of alliance seeking, alliance initiation, and alliance formation. Tricia Bacon, *Why Terrorist Groups Form International Alliances* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).
101. As a counterpoint to this claim, Aaron Zelin suggested in 2012 that the rise of multiple "Ansar al-Sharia" networks in 2012 might signal "an end of al-Qaeda's unipolar global jihad of the past decade and a return to a multipolar jihadosphere, similar to the 1990s." Aaron Zelin, "Know

Your Ansar al-Sharia," *Foreign Policy*, September 21, 2012, https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/09/21/know-your-ansar-al-sharia/.

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103. Bacon, *Why Terrorist Groups Form International Alliances*, 20.
104. As Stig Hansen notes, when understanding motivations for jihadi activity, there are those who ascribe instrumentalist reasons (the use of religion to achieve personal or political gain) versus personal religious beliefs (those who believe in the ideas themselves). These notions of instrumentalism and personal religious beliefs generally track with our "materialist" and "ideological" discussions. Hansen, "The Islamic State Is Losing in Africa."
105. Clarke, *After the Caliphate*, 32.
106. For instance, scholars have suggested that GSPC in Algeria, which had become an al-Qaeda affiliate in 2006 but did not change its name to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb until 2007, did so "merely [as] a marketing strategy that the group utilized to gain more exposure in order to enlarge their pool of recruits." Richard Chelin, "From the Islamic State of Algeria to the Economic Caliphate of the Sahel: The Transformation of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2018): 8, https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2018.1454316.
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109. Morten Bøas and Kevin Dunn, *Africa's Insurgents: Navigating an Evolving Landscape* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2017), 12–13.
110. Bacon, *Why Terrorist Groups Form International Alliances*, 30, 37.
111. Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamic Group 2005–2012* (New York: Oxford, 2013), 24;

Chelin, "From the Islamic State of Algeria to the Economic Caliphate of the Sahel," 5.

112. James Astill, "Osama: The Sudan Years," *The Guardian*, October 16, 2001, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/oct/17/afghanistan.terrorism3.
113. Mendelsohn, *The al-Qaeda Franchise*, 2.
114. Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 24. For an extensive conversation on Bin Laden and al-Qaeda's history in Sudan, see Stig Jarle Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift* (London: Hurst, 2019), chapter 3.
115. Daniel Byman, "Judging al-Qaeda's Record, Part I: Is the Organization in Decline?," Lawfare, June 27, 2017, https://www.lawfareblog.com/judging-al-qaedas-record-part-i-organization-decline.
116. Mendelsohn, *The al-Qaeda Franchise*, 110.
117. This affiliation was that of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's organization, which subsequently became al-Qaeda in the Land of Two Rivers. Tricia Bacon, "Is the Enemy of My Enemy My Friend? How Terrorist Groups Select Partners," *Security Studies* 27, no. 3 (2018): 369, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1416813.
118. Mendelsohn, *The al-Qaeda Franchise*, 2.
119. For instance, Mendelsohn notes that AQ Central announced that it had created branches with members of Gama'a Islamiyya in Egypt and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, but none came to meaningful fruition. Guerin, "Isis in Iraq: Militants 'Getting Stronger Again.'"
120. See Mendelsohn, *The al-Qaeda Franchise*.
121. To the extent that the authors use al-Qaeda's franchising experience as a shadow case for the Islamic State's, we also emphasize that their franchising strategies showed some important differences. For one, al-Qaeda began creating franchises more than a decade after its initial emergence; for its part, the Islamic State began franchising almost instantly. A second important point is that while most observers have noted that al-Qaeda began its franchising operations while in decline, the Islamic State began its efforts to gain global affiliates in its ascendancy. Third, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State's affiliates ostensibly had different targets: whereas al-Qaeda's affiliates were intended to attack instantiations of the Western "far enemy" in their areas of

operation, the Islamic State's affiliates were intended, at least on the surface, to attack the "near enemy," in the form of apostate regimes and other *kuffar*. See Mendelsohn, *The al-Qaeda Franchise*.

122. For background on the IS presence in Libya, see Manne Crone, "Islamic State's Incursion into North Africa and Sahel: A Threat to al-Qaeda?," *Connections* 16, no. 1 (2017): 63–76, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26326471; Jason Pack, Rhiannon Smith, and Karim Mezran, "The Origins and Evolution of ISIS in Libya," Atlantic Council, 2017, www.jstor.org/stable/resrep03718; Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Islamic State's First Colony in Libya," Washington Institute PolicyWatch 2325, October 10, 2014, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-islamic-states-first-colony-in-libya.
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135. This number includes those provinces in Iraq and Syria.
136. In general, there are two types of *bayah*: first, there is a general *bayah*, which requires pledgers to follow all IS Central dictates, unless it spots *kufr*. The second type, however, is called a specialized *bayah*, in which a group undertakes to do a specific type of task. But in the case of IS Central, these were all general pledges.
137. Personal communication, Muhammad al-'Ubaydi, June 2019.
138. See Mendelsohn, *The al-Qaeda Franchise*, 14.
139. As Mendelsohn has noted, the very notion of jihadi franchising should not be taken as a given, since there are sundry other options for terror group expansion that do not involve creating a central node with affiliate branches (Mendelson, *The al-Qaeda Franchise*). For her part, Tricia Bacon emphasizes that, indeed, "terrorist groups are poorly positioned to ally," since as clandestine, suspicious, and violent organizations with short time horizons and low survival rates, "terror groups are prone to cheating and defection." Bacon, *Why Terrorist Groups Form International Alliances*, 349.
140. See Mendelsohn, *The al-Qaeda Franchise*.
141. Clarke, *After the Caliphate*, 30.
142. Mendelsohn, *The al-Qaeda Franchise*, 18.
143. Cristiani, "Ten Years of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb."
144. Mendelsohn, *The al-Qaeda Franchise*, 2.
145. Clarke, *After the Caliphate*, 33.
146. Daniel Byman, "Buddies or Burdens? Understanding the al-Qaeda Relationship with Its Affiliate Organizations," *Security Studies* 12, no. 3 (2014): 433, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09636412.2014.935228?journalCode=fsst20.
147. Price et al., *The Group That Calls Itself a State*.
148. Ibid., 2
149. Ibid., 2.
150. Ibid., 2.

151. The one exception to this rule—the IS Central demand for the centralization of media production and distribution—is the anomaly.
152. This phenomenon of ostensible cooperation with little practical coordination is most closely captured by Tricia Bacon's discussions of terrorist "harmony," which "refers to situations in which a [terror] group's actions facilitate the attainment of another group's goals without coordination" and which "does not reach the threshold of cooperation, or by extension, an alliance." Bacon, *Why Terrorist Groups Form International Alliances*, 348.
153. See, for instance, exchanges on the degree of al-Qaeda's influence on Boko Haram. They are best read chronologically: Jacob Zenn, "Demystifying al-Qaida in Nigeria: Cases from Boko Haram's Founding, Launch of Jihad and Suicide Bombings," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no. 6 (2017): 173–189, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26295966; Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, Kyari Mohammed, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, and Alex Thurston, "A Response to Jacob Zenn on Boko Haram and al-Qaeda," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12, no. 2 (2018): 203–213, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26413341; Jacob Zenn, "A Primer on Boko Haram Sources and Three Heuristics on al-Qaeda and Boko Haram in Response to Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, Kyari Mohammed, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, and Alex Thurston," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12, no. 3 (2018): 74–91, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26453137.
154. This phrasing originates from the editors of the *Perspectives on Terrorism* article by Higazi et al., "A Response to Jacob Zenn on Boko Haram and al-Qaeda."
155. Hansen, *Horn, Sahel and Rift*, 5–6.
156. See Christopher Anzalone, "The Evolution of an American Jihadi: The Case of Omar Hammami," *CTC Sentinel* 5, no. 6 (2012), https://ctc.usma.edu/the-evolution-of-an-american-jihadi-the-case-of-omar-hammami/.
157. We thank Robert Feldman for this point. Author correspondence, Robert Feldman, January 2020.
158. Aaron Zelin, "Not Gonna Be Able to Do It: al-Qaeda in Tunisia's Inability to Take Advantage of the Islamic State's Setbacks," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 1 (2019): 72,

https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/not-gonna-be-able-to-do-it-al-qaeda-in-tunisias-inability-to-take-advantage.

159. Some notable work on this front has been done by Tricia Bacon (2018). Other work on terror group alliances has been done by Assaf Moghadam, Brian Philips, and by Victor H. Asal, Hyun Hee Park, R. Karl Rethemeyer, and Gary Ackerman, "With Friends Like These … Why Terrorist Organizations Ally," *International Public Management Journal* 19, no. 1 (2016).
160. To date, Stig Hanen's 2019 book *Horn, Rift, and Sahel: Fault Lines of African Jihad* (Hurst) is the best work available on such topics. However, his approach varies significantly from ours, in that he not only investigates both al-Qaeda and IS affiliates on the continent, he also does so primarily through the lens of territoriality.
161. Those scholars that have written comparative studies of African jihadi groups include Warner (2017), writing on various Islamic State branches in Africa; Warner and Weiss, "A Legitimate Challenger?" on a comparison of al-Shabaab and IS–Somalia's capabilities; Warner and Hulme, "The Islamic State in Africa," on estimates of IS fighter numbers; and Anzalone, "Black Banners in Somalia," on comparisons between al-Shabaab and IS–Somalia. Aaron Zelin has compared Ansar al-Sharia branches around the continent. See Zelin, "Know Your Ansar al-Sharia."
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2. THE ISLAMIC STATE IN LIBYA

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noticeably shifted from being directed against Israeli targets to focusing on Egyptian targets. The plight of Gazans appears to have taken a backseat in the group's statements, with greater emphasis on serving as the 'Caliph's soldiers' to create a universal and borderless Islamic state." Nelly Lahoud, "The Province of Sinai: Why Bother with Palestine if You Can Be Part of the Islamic State?," *CTC Sentinel* 8, no. 3 (2015), https://ctc.usma.edu/the-province-of-sinai-why-bother-with-palestine-if-you-can-be-part-of-the-islamic-state/.

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37. Glavin, "Remaining and Expanding." One notable ABM personality lost in these counterterrorism operations was senior commander Tawfiq Mohammad Faraj, who was killed on March 11, 2014. On the same day that Faraj was killed, another member of ABM's executive body, Muhammad al-Sayyid Mansur al-Tukhi, was also killed in a separate security operation. In the weeks following Faraj's and al-Tukhi's killings, other senior ABM figures such as Shadi al-Menei (who assumed leadership of the group), Khaled al-Menei, and Faysal Husayn Salim Sulayman were killed in Egyptian counterterrorism initiatives. Gartenstein-Ross, "Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis's Oath of Allegiance to the Islamic State," 5–6.
38. Gartenstein-Ross, "Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis's Oath of Allegiance to the Islamic State," 6.
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40. Ibid., 5–6.
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42. Author correspondence, Samuel Tadros, February 13, 2021.
43. Indeed, reports show that even before the declaration of the caliphate, in 2013, al-Baghdadi had been in contact with the head of a local Sinai-based militant group known as al-Muhajirun wal-Ansar, and offered him $10,000 if the man would pledge his group's fealty to al-Baghdadi.
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45. Ibid., 8.
46. Glavin, "Remaining and Expanding."
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48. Ibid.; Oded Berkowitz (@Oded121351), "US State Department Terrorist Designation of Muhammad al-Isawi (Abu Usama al-Masri), #ISIS Wilayat #Sinais leader," Twitter, May 20, 2017, https://twitter.com/Oded121351/status/865855974724206596/photo/1.
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53. Conal Urquhart, "Egyptian Islamists Pledge Allegiance to ISIS," *Time*, November 10, 2014, https://time.com/3575654/egyptian-islamists-isis/.
54. Kirkpatrick, "Militant Group in Egypt Vows Loyalty to ISIS."
55. Gartenstein-Ross, "Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis's Oath of Allegiance to the Islamic State," 9. As Nelly Lahoud has noted, one of those "preemptive" *bayat* was given on November 3, 2014, when a pledge from ABM was uploaded to a jihadist website. ABM quickly denied that the pledge came from it, disputing, via its Twitter account, that the Twitter statement "attributed to us … has anything to do with us." See Lahoud, "The Province of Sinai."
56. As a Stratfor analyst has suggested: "A capable portion of Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, led by former Egyptian special operations forces officer Hisham Ashmawy and operating in the Egyptian mainland, did not break from al Qaeda." See "Assessing the Jihadist Threat in Egypt: The Sinai Peninsula," Stratfor, June 2016, https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/assessing-jihadist-threat-egypt-sinai-peninsula.
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155. As the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy notes, weeks before the attack on the mosque, IS–Sinai had been handing out flyers to those

near the Belal Mosque, telling them to cease "heretical" Sufi worship. See "Attack at al-Rawda Mosque."

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war and the emergence of the predecessor group to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Further, Ennahda did not gain an absolute majority and went into coalition with two secular center-left parties, Congress for the Republic (CPR) and Ettakatol—a coalition which would become known as the "Troika." Former human rights activist and founder of CPR, Moncef Marzouki, was elected interim president by the National Constituent Assembly (NCA), with limited powers under the Ennahda-led government; he earned the derogatory nickname "tartour," basically meaning puppet.

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46. Not only were Tunisians eager to travel to the Islamic State between 2014 and 2015, but for its part the Islamic State readily absorbed Tunisians. This stood in stark contrast to al-Qaeda's proxy in the region, Jabhat al-Nusra, which, it has been noted, prasticed overly extreme vetting processes and arguably discriminated against Tunisians for their North Africa heritage. As Gartenstein-Ross and Moreng have noted, for Tunisian foreign fighters in Syria, preferences for the Islamic State over AQ's Jabhat al-Nusra were common. Gartenstein-Ross and Moreng, "Tunisian Jihadism after the Sousse Massacre."
47. For an extensive discussion of the role of the Tunisians in the Islamic State, see Zelin, "Tunisian Foreign Fighters," 15–17.
48. Ibid. What has led Tunisians to be so historically overrepresented among foreign fighter jihadi ranks? According to Zelin, altruism, anti-colonialism, "the bandwagon effect," disillusionment with Tunisian post-revolution politics, pursuit of economic opportunity, establishment of the caliphate, impressionability, open conditions, personal tragedy, prison radicalization, recidivism, desire for redemption, sense of religious void, and sectarianism, all inform these trends. In addition to Tunisians fighting in Syria, Arieff, citing the UN, notes that in 2015 there were some 15,000 Tunisian foreign fighters in Libya, 200 in Iraq, 60 in Mali, and 50 in Yemen (as cited in Arieff, "Tunisia in Brief," 9).
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55. Lisa Watanabe, "The Islamic State in North Africa: Still There, Still Struggling to Expand," *Middle East Policy* 24 no. 2, 140, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/mepo.12274.
56. In 2006–7, the organization made a failed and short-lived attempt to launch an insurgency under the moniker Jund Asad bin al-Furat, known as the Soliman events, which Aaron Zelin describes as AQIM's "test run" in Tunisia. See Zelin, "Not Gonna Be Able to Do It."
57. Lounnas, "The Tunisian Jihad." KUBN's first act of recorded violence was a clash between its members and members of the Tunisian security forces in Rouhia, Tunisia, in May 2011.
58. Ibid.
59. Zelin, "Not Gonna Be Able to Do It," 65; Lounnas, "The Tunisian Jihad."
60. Zelin, "Not Gonna Be Able to Do It."
61. However, despite its growth, overall KUBN always remained relatively weak. Its fighter ranks never exceeded an estimated 200 to 300 fighters, nor was it ever able to establish much of a territorial hold. Lounnas, "The Tunisian Jihad."
62. Ibid.
63. Gartenstein-Ross and Moreng, "Tunisian Jihadism after the Sousse Massacre," 13.
64. Ibid., 15.
65. KUBN formally admitted AQIM ties in January 2015. Zelin, "Not Gonna Be Able to Do It," 65.
66. For instance, when KUBN operatives were arrested in December 2012, Tunisian interior minister Ali Laarayedh described the group as part of a network under the command of AQIM and its leader, Abdelmalek Droukdel. The Tunisian state would again reference the links between

AQIM and Katibat Uqba bin Nafi during the proscription of Ansar al-Sharia, which was now formally designated as the political patron of the Jebel el-Chaambi-based armed organization. During this time, a document circulated in the Tunisian media claiming that Ansar al-Sharia leader, Ben Hassine, had pledged allegiance to his AQIM counterpart, Droukdel.

67. For instance, Djallil Lounnas has described the existence of a previous *bayah* in June 2014 from a group of AST defectors called "Shabab al-Tawhid," which posted a declaration of allegiance to al-Baghdadi on its website. However, as Lounnas assesses, this pledge turned out to be nothing more than a "virtual phenomenon in scope." Lounnas, "The Tunisian Jihad."
68. Zelin, "Not Gonna Be Able to Do It," 66.
69. Al-Qayrawan (or Kairouan) is a city in Tunisia considered the country's religious capital. Kairouan was known to be a hotbed for conservative Islamist thought, and had been a particularly high contributor to the estimated 100,000-strong membership of Ansar al-Sharia. In the 7th and 8th centuries it was the seat of Arab rulers in North Africa. It holds high symbolic value in contemporary jihadi discourse as a city to be reconquered so as to become the prosaic springboard from where today's "descendants" of the founder, Uqba bin Nafi, would reconquer northwest Africa.
70. As quoted in Zelin, "Not Gonna Be Able to Do It," 66.
71. Aaron Zelin, *Your Sons are at Your Service: Tunisia's Missionaries of Jihad* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020). 239–240.
72. Zelin, *Your Sons are at Your Service*, 240.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid. For its part, Ifriqiyah Media would continue the process of trying to push the otherwise Al-Qaeda-dominated Tunisian landscape to the side of the Islamic State by publishing more and more pro-IS content. Eventually, Zelin suggests that the group was exclusively publishing Islamic State and Islamic State in Tunisia products, in an attempt to undermine AQIM's presence in the region. Zelin, "Not Gonna Be Able to Do It," 66.
75. Ibid.
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86. Audio file followed by transcript posted on Shumukh jihadi forums in March 2015. This was followed by an article in *Dabiq* no. 8 from March 2015. Author correspondence, Muhammad al-Ubaydi, February 2020.
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90. Author correspondence, Muhammad al-Ubaydi, July 2019.
91. Al-Bayan radio station, May 19, 2015. Shared via author correspondence, Muhammad al-Ubaydi, January 2020.
92. Gartenstein-Ross and Moreng, "Tunisia after the Sousse Massacre," 14.
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149. Ibid.
150. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province," 4.
151. Brigaglia, "'Slicing Off the Tumor.'"
152. Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, "The 'Boko Haram' Allegiance Pledge to Islamic State: An Ansar al-Shari'a Tunisia Connection," translated August 8, 2018, www.aymennjawad.org/21476/the-boko-haram-allegiance-pledge-to-islamic-state.
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161. Freedom Onuoha and Samuel Oyewole, "Anatomy of Boko Haram: The Rise and Decline of a Violent Group in Nigeria," Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, April 22, 2018, http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2018/04/anatomy-boko-haram-rise-decline-violent-group-nigeria-180422110920231.html.
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166. Vincent Foucher, "The Islamic State Franchises in Africa: Lessons from Lake Chad," International Crisis Group, October 29, 2020, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/islamic-state-franchises-africa-lessons-lake-chad.
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168. John Campbell, "Nigeria Retakes Territory from Boko Haram," Council on Foreign Relations, March 24, 2015,

https://www.cfr.org/blog/nigeria-retakes-territory-boko-haram.

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171. Mahmood and Ani, "Factional Dynamics within Boko Haram," 6.
172. For instance, Kendhammer and McCain note: "Videos released in late 2014 … show [Boko Haram/ISWAP members] receiving sermons from Shekau and highlight their military equipment, but provide no evidence of public services. Indeed, the only real evidence of community-facing efforts by the group during this time are reports of forcible conversion, mandatory Islamic instruction, and the execution of elderly locals unable to flee occupied territory." Kendhammer and McCain, *Boko Haram*, 124. Among other reasons that Boko Haram/ISWAP under Shekau was not inclined to govern were the expansiveness of the area that it ostensibly occupied and poor communication and coordination between its various fighters that occupied towns. Kendhammer and McCain, *Boko Haram*, 124–145.
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178. Mahmood and Ani, "Factional Dynamics within Boko Haram," 11.
179. Zenn and Pieri, "How Much Takfir Is Too Much Takfir?," 283.
180. Zenn, "Boko Haram's Factional Feuds," 17.
181. Jacob Zenn, "The Islamic State's Provinces on the Peripheries: Juxtaposing the Pledges from Boko Haram in Nigeria and Abu Sayyaf and Maute Group in the Philippines," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13, no. 1 (2019).
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183. "Boko Haram Fracturing over Islamic State Ties, U.S. General Warns," Reuters, June 21, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-nigeria-boko-haram-idUSKCN0Z72WT.
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185. Jason Warner and Hilary Matfess, "Exploding Stereotypes: The Unexpected Operational and Demographic Characteristics of Boko Haram's Suicide Bombers," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, August 9, 2017, https://ctc.usma.edu/report-exploding-stereotypes-the-unexpected-operational-and-demographic-characteristics-of-boko-harams-suicide-bombers/; Jason Warner, Ellen Chapin, and Hilary Matfess, "Suicide Squads: The Logic of Linked Suicide Bombings," *Security Studies* 28, no. 1 (2019): 25–57, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2018.1508632.
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187. "New Boko Haram Leader Named," Defenceweb, August 4, 2016, https://www.defenceweb.co.za/security/civil-security/new-boko-haram-leader-named/?catid=3%3ACivil%20Security.
188. Of note, Nur is reported to have stepped aside, to allow al-Barnawi to ascend to the new leadership of ISWAP, believing that he, al-Barnawi, would be a less controversial appointee given his direct lineage with the group's founder, Mohammed Yusuf. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province."
189. "The Six Lives of Boko Haram's Abubakar Shekau," BBC, September 27, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-37476453.
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193. "Shekau Releases Audio Message, Says He Is Still in Charge," *Vanguard*, August 4, 2016, https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/08/boko-haram-abubakar-shekau-releases-audio-message-says-still-in-charge/.
194. "New Boko Haram Leader, Abu Musab al-Barnawi Accuses Abubakar Shekau of Corruption" (translated by Nishadi TV), YouTube, August 5, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86TwFqg-Aqc.
195. Ibid.
196. Ibid., 32.
197. This term is a common slur used by jihadists towards more extreme jihadists. For example, Jabhat al-Nusra and other Islamist groups frequently called IS "Khawarij" (the Arabic plural). Ahrar al-Sham even made a *rasheed* (vocal music) against IS with *khawarij* as the hook.
198. "Cutting off the Tumor of Shekau's Kharijites."
199. Ibid.
200. "As Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab stated—and this is the line around which the Hazimi-Bin'ali debate revolves—'Whoso fails to make takfir of the polytheists, or has doubts concerning their unbelief, or deems their doctrine to be sound, has [himself] disbelieved.'" Cole Bunzel, "Caliphate in Disarray: Theological Turmoil in the Islamic State," Jihadica, October 3, 2017, http://www.jihadica.com/caliphate-in-disarray.
201. R. Green, "Dispute over Takfir Rocks Islamic State," Middle East Media Research Institute, August 4, 2017, https://www.memri.org/reports/dispute-over-takfir-rocks-islamic-state.
202. "Cutting off the Tumor of Shekau's Kharijites."
203. Ibid., 41.
204. Nwankpa in Kassim and Nwankpa, *The Boko Haram Reader*, 401.
205. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province."

206. Analysis of video footage released by ISWAP following these raids on security installations undertaken by Calibre Obscura provided some important insights into the hardware the group had at its disposal. The majority of weapons recorded in this video were seemingly issued to the militaries of Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon, which had all been targeted by ISWAP militants. This was particularly the case with regards to automatic rifles that ISWAP members were recorded to have in their possession; however, it also extended to heavier forms of hardware used by the group, which included howitzers, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, mortar rounds, fragmentation grenades and (with reference to armored vehicles in the group's possession) the possession of multiple military-issued Armoured Personnel Carriers. Importantly, however, none of the weaponry or military equipment observed in ISWAP's armory is anomalous for West Africa, which would dilute speculation that the group may have received direct arms shipments from the Islamic State itself. "The Weaponry of IS West Africa," Calibre Obscura, January 20, 2019, https://www.calibreobscura.com/the-weaponary-of-is-west-africa-boko-haram/.
207. Ibid., 9.
208. Zenn and Pieri, "How Much Takfir Is Too Much Takfir?," 282.
209. For analytical clarity, Jason Warner and Stephanie Lizzo have suggested referring to the al-Barnawi-led group as "ISWAP2" and the new Shekau-led JAS as "JAS2." Jason Warner and Stephanie Lizzo, "The 'Boko Haram Disaggregation Problem' and Comparative Profiles of Factional Violence: Challenges, Impacts, and Solutions in the Study of Africa's Deadliest Terror Group(s)," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2021, forthcoming).
210. "Deadly Boko Haram Attacks in Northeastern Nigeria Boko Haram News," Al-Jazeera, September 26, 2016, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/9/26/deadly-boko-haram-attacks-in-northeastern-nigeria.
211. Warner and Matfess, "Exploding Stereotypes," 35.
212. UN estimates cited in Michelle Nichols, "Islamic State in Libya Hampered by Lack of Fighters: U.N. Experts," Reuters, December 1, 2015.

213. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province," 7.
214. Ibid., 51.
215. Mahmood and Ani, "Factional Dynamics within Boko Haram."
216. Joe Parkinson, Drew Hinshaw, and Gbenga Akingbule, "Islamic State Faction in Nigeria Follows Boko Haram's Playbook: Kidnapping Schoolgirls," *Wall Street Journal*, March 18, 2018, https://www.wsj.com/articles/nigeria-mass-abduction-seen-as-copycat-attack-1521403236.
217. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province," 7.
218. "Survival and Expansion: The Islamic State's West Africa Province," Global Initiative for Civil Stabilisation, April 2019, https://divergentoptions.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/GICS-Survival-And-Expansion-of-the-Islamic-States-West-African-Province-Full.pdf.
219. Ibid.
220. Mahmood and Ani, "Factional Dynamics within Boko Haram," 15.
221. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province," 7.
222. This instance occurred on February 10, 2018, when two sets of hostages, who had been abducted by separate factions, one JAS and one ISWAP, were released at the same time. While some consider this joint release a coincidence, others seem to think that it may be evidence of cooperation. See Mahmood and Ani, "Factional Dynamics within Boko Haram," 15.
223. According to the ICG, these occurred in January and February 2019, and involved fighters from both groups. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province," 9.
224. Ibid., 56.
225. Ibid.
226. Ibid., 56.
227. One enduring problem in the study of ISWAP, JAS, and Boko Haram violence after the August 2016 split has been the inability to know which faction carried out the violence. For more, see Warner and Lizzo, "The Boko Haram Disaggregation Problem."

228. Jonathan Gopep, Dionne Searcey, and Emmanuel Akinwotu, "Boko Haram's Seizure of 110 Girls Taunts Nigeria, and Its Leader," *New York Times*, March 18, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/18/world/africa/boko-haram-dapchi-girls-nigeria.html.
229. Ibid.
230. Ibid.
231. Ibid.
232. "'Girls Rescued' after Militant Attack," BBC, February 22, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43122095.
233. Gopep, Searcey, and Akinwotu, "Boko Haram's Seizure of 110 Girls Taunts Nigeria, and Its Leader."
234. "Anger over Missing Nigerian Schoolgirls," BBC, February 22, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43158216.
235. "Why Troops Were Moved Out of Dapchi," *Vanguard*, February 26, 2018, https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/02/dapchi-girls-military-clarifies-movements-troops/.
236. "Nigeria Mass Girl Kidnaps a 'Disaster,'" BBC, February 23, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43177237.
237. "Kidnapped Schoolgirls Freed in Nigeria," BBC, March 22, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43484146.
238. "Dapchi Girls: Freed Nigerian Girls Tell of Kidnap Ordeal," BBC, March 28, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/43489217.
239. Kendhammer and McCain, *Boko Haram*, 201.
240. For one explanation, see "Boko Haram Gives Reason For Release of Dapchi Girls, Denies Ceasefire Talks with FG," Sahara Reporters, April 9, 2018, http://saharareporters.com/2018/04/09/boko-haram-gives-reason-release-dapchi-girls-denies-ceasefire-talks-fg. Zenn has offered a plausible theory that despite IS Central's request to its affiliate provinces, like ISWAP, not to enslave Muslims for ransom, a break-away faction of ISWAP did so anyway. When ISWAP's leader discovered that his intransigent subordinates did so, he demanded the Dapchi girls be returned. Jacob Zenn, "Competing Ideologies at Play in Boko Haram's Return of Dapchi Girls," Council on Foreign Relations, April 4, 2018, https://www.cfr.org/blog/competing-ideologies-play-boko-harams-return-dapchi-girls.

241. Nur's decision to release the Dapchi hostages owing to their religious adherence to Islam had angered both his followers and the IS leadership itself. This, according to a government negotiator in the Dapchi mass abduction, was since the Nigerian government was willing to pay a ransom for the girls whose kidnapping had severely challenged a narrative that Nigeria's Islamist insurgency had lost its violent momentum. According to the negotiator, Nur had unanimously decided to free the girls, noting that the acceptance of a cash ransom for Muslim civilians would render ISWAP no different from the rival faction led by Shekau with which they had severed ties.
242. Timothy Antigha, "Counter-Insurgency: The Broader Implications of Recent Execution of Boko Haram Commanders by Colonel Timothy Antigha," Sahara Reporters, October 8, 2018, http://saharareporters.com/2018/10/08/counter-%E2%80%93-insurgency-broader-implications-recent-execution-boko-haram-commanders-colonel.
243. Zenn, "The Islamic State's Provinces on the Peripheries," 94.
244. Ruth Maclean, "Senior Boko Haram Figure Reported Killed by Allies," *The Guardian*, September 14, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/14/senior-boko-haram-figure-reportedly-killed-by-allies.
245. Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram's Ultra-Extremist Side Resurfaces: From the Execution of Mamman Nur to Humanitarian Workers," *Terrorism Monitor* 16, no. 20 (2018), https://jamestown.org/program/boko-harams-ultra-extremist-side-resurfaces-from-the-execution-of-mamman-nur-to-humanitarian-workers/. As Jacob Zenn notes, the execution of Nur came in the aftermath of the execution of another ISWAP member, Ali Gaga, who had been killed as a result of his presumed decision to turn himself over to the Nigerian government. Zenn, "Boko Haram's Ultra-Extremist Side Resurfaces."
246. "Survival and Expansion."
247. "Al-Barnawi" denotes that the person is from Borno, and thus, though both the current and former ISWAP leaders have "al-Barnawi" in their names, they do not necessarily have any blood relationship.
248. For being a satellite of the Islamic State, ISWAP in 2015 and 2016 engaged in relatively few attempts at "governance" per se. While, as Zenn notes, Boko Haram pre-2015 showed examples of its own

governance in chopping off the hands of thieves, violence as such, not attempts at governance, typified ISWAP under Shekau. Zenn, "Boko Haram's Factional Feuds," 1.

249. Malik Samuel, "Economics of Terrorism in Lake Chad Basin," Institute for Security Studies, July 10, 2019, https://issafrica.org/iss-today/economics-of-terrorism-in-lake-chad-basin; "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province."
250. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province," 17.
251. Samuel, "Economics of Terrorism in Lake Chad Basin."
252. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province," 17.
253. Ibid.
254. Samuel, "Economics of Terrorism in Lake Chad Basin."
255. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province," 18.
256. Kendhammer and McCain, *Boko Haram*, 201.
257. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province," 18.
258. Samuel, "Economics of Terrorism in Lake Chad Basin."
259. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province," 18.
260. Ibid.
261. Samuel, "Economics of Terrorism in Lake Chad Basin."
262. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province," 16.
263. Ibid., 16–17.
264. "Nigeria: Boko Haram Executes Second Female Aid Worker," Al-Jazeera, October 15, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/10/nigeria-boko-haram-executes-female-aid-worker-181015194542623.html.
265. As quoted in Zenn, "Boko Haram's Ultra-Extremist Side Resurfaces"; "Nigeria: Boko Haram Executes Second Female Aid Worker."
266. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province," 16.
267. Warner and Matfess, "Exploding Stereotypes."

268. Hassan Idayat, "The Danger of a Better-Behaved Boko Haram," New Humanitarian, August 21, 2018, https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2018/08/21/opinion-nigeria-militancy-peace-boko-haram.
269. "Survival and Expansion."
270. "Intelbrief: The Islamic State in West Africa Province Is Growing in Strength and Sophistication," Soufan Group, October 1, 2019, https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-the-islamic-state-in-west-africa-province-is-growing-in-strength-and-sophistication/.
271. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province," 9.
272. Zenn, "Boko Haram's Factional Feuds," 9.
273. "Islamic State Faction in Nigeria Follows Boko Haram Playbook."
274. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province," 9.
275. For a full translation of ISWAP's calls for members in Somalia to join, see Text #68 in Kassim and Nwankpa, *The Boko Haram Reader*, 433–434.
276. Zenn, "The Islamic State's Provinces on the Peripheries," 88.
277. "Survival and Expansion."
278. Zenn, "The Islamic State's Provinces on the Peripheries," 92.
279. Zenn, "Boko Haram's Factional Feuds," 20.
280. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province," 3.
281. "IntelBrief: The Islamic State in West Africa Province Is Growing in Strength and Sophistication."
282. "Survival and Expansion."
283. "Islamic State Faction in Nigeria Follows Boko Haram Playbook."
284. Zenn, "The Islamic State's Provinces on the Peripheries," 92 n. 36.
285. Ibid., 56.
286. "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West African Province," 9.
287. Ibid., 10.
288. Notably, ISWAP has also been among the groups that have been most responsive to the death of IS caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The group, alongside Egypt's Wilayat Sinai affiliate, has conducted the highest frequency of attacks, which have been cited by the group as being in

direct retaliation for the death of the caliph and which followed calls by the Islamic State for such acts of retribution. One of the most notable acts of violence in this regard was the December 25, 2019 beheading of eleven Christian hostages by ISWAP, a report of which was released by the Islamic State's Amaq agency to coincide with Christmas Day celebrations.

7. THE ISLAMIC STATE'S WEST AFRICA PROVINCE—GREATER SAHARA

1. Benjamin Roger, "Sur les traces d'Abou Walid al-Sahraoui, le jihadiste le plus recherché d'Afrique de l'Ouest," *Jeune Afrique*, February 10, 2020.
2. Lahbib's family belonged to the powerful Reguibat tribe. Abdi, Lahbib's father, was a trader from the Lebouihat faction and the wealthy Joumani family. The grandfather of Lahbib was the prominent Sahraoui tribal chief Khatri Ould Joumani. Mustapha Naïmi, *L'ouest saharien, la perception de l'espace dans la pensée politique tribale* (Paris: Karthala, 2013). Khatri gave an oath of allegiance to the Moroccan king Hassan II in 1975. Fahd Iraqi, "Maroc—Sahara occidental: les Joumani, un bernouss et des privilèges," *Jeune Afrique*, March 1, 2018, http://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/531859/politique/maroc-sahara-occidental-les-joumani-un-bernouss-et-des-privileges/.
3. Lahbib's mother, Malouma, originated from the Ouled Moussa, also a faction of the Reguibat; her brother Hassana, Lahbib's uncle, was the *qadi*. (A *qadi* or *cadi* is the magistrate or judge of the sharia court, who also exercises extrajudicial functions, such as mediation, guardianship over orphans and minors, and supervision and auditing of public works of the province.) "Who Is Adnan Abu al-Walid al-Sahraoui" (title translated from Arabic, testimony by a childhood friend), Le360, YouTube, May 8, 2016.
4. The Alawite kingdom of Morocco is believed by Moroccan monarchs to be a sacred, indivisible kingdom stretching from the Mediterranean city of Tangier in the north to Lagouira, the southernmost Moroccan village, which rests on the border with Mauritania.
5. Paula Vernet, "Decolonization: Spanish Territories," *Max Planck Encyclopedias of International Law*, July 2017,

http://opil.ouplaw.com/view/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e928.

6. Fatna el-Bouih, *Talk of Darkness*, trans. Mustapha Kamal and Susan Slyomovics (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008), xiv.
7. Polisario derives from the Spanish abbreviation of Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro (Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro).
8. "Resolution 690," United Nations Security Council, April 29, 1991, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/690(1991).
9. "UN Has 'Failed in Its Obligations' towards Sahrawi People," Sahara Press Service, November 15, 2020, https://www.spsrasd.info/news/en/articles/2020/11/15/28522.html.
10. Roger, "Sur les traces d'Abou Walid al-Sahraoui."
11. Ibid., 1.
12. "Who is Adnan Abu al-Walid al-Sahraoui."
13. "IRIN Update 993 of Events in West Africa," ReliefWeb, June 11, 2001, https://reliefweb.int/report/algeria/irin-update-993-events-west-africa.
14. Roger, "Sur les traces d'Abou Walid al-Sahraoui."
15. Yvan Guichaou and Andrew Lebovich, "America's Options in Niger: Join Forces to Reduce Tensions, or Fan the Flames," The Conversation, November 2, 2017, https://theconversation.com/americas-options-in-niger-join-forces-to-reduce-tensions-or-fan-the-flames-86655.
16. Other Sahraouis from the camps in Tindouf, where AQIM recruited heavily, also joined.
17. Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahraoui's initial was paradoxically Abu Walid al-Maghribi (the Moroccan).
18. Over the course of her kidnapping, on several occasions, she would meet al-Sahraoui, who would also serve as the negotiator for her release. Upon securing her freedom, she described al-Sahraoui as polite and talkative, and regularly briefing her on the progress of the negotiations. Ultimately, all three were released, though Sahraoui's exact role in the negotiations remains unclear. "Freed Al-Qaeda Hostage Returns to Italy," IOL News, April 18, 2012, https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/freed-al-qaeda-hostage-returns-to-italy-1278941; Christian Lowe and Lamine Chikhi, "Gunmen Kidnap Italian Woman Tourist in Algeria," Reuters,

https://www.reuters.com/article/us-security-algeria-kidnap/gunmen-kidnap-italian-woman-tourist-in-algeria-idUSTRE7133OP20110204; Loretta Napoleoni, *Merchants of Men: How Jihadists and ISIS Turned Kidnapping and Refugee Trafficking into a Multi-Billion Dollar Business* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2016).

19. Jason Warner, Ellen Chapin, and Caleb Weis, "Desert Drift, Declining Deadliness: Understanding the Evolution of AQIM's Suicide Bombings," Combating Terrorism Center, West Point, October 15, 2020, https://ctc.usma.edu/desert-drift-declining-deadliness-understanding-the-evolution-of-aqims-suicide-bombings/.
20. "Messages from the Mujahid's Notebook: Shaykh Usaamah and the Story of His Support for the Algerian Jihad," *Ifriqiya Muslimah*, March 25, 2016. According to other accounts, in 1998, represented by Mokhtar Belmokhtar (an eventual AQIM commander) in the area of Tizerzeit in the extreme north of Niger. Author correspondence, Nigerien military commander, November 2019.
21. By the mid-2000s, AQIM's predecessor, the GSPC, had developed Mauritania into a key node of its operations, focusing on targeting Western interests, primarily kidnapping and killing foreigners. A milestone in the "southern turn" that the jihadis themselves would term the "Sahara conquest" occurred in June 2005, when GSPC militants staged a mass-casualty attack on a Mauritanian military base in Lemgheity. In a 2006 interview, Belmokhtar referred to Mauritania as the land that gave rise to the 11th-century Almoravid dynasty, which eventually inspired the branding of two jihadi formations founded and co-founded (respectively) by Belmokhtar, namely al-Mulathamin and al-Mourabitoun. Geoff D. Porter, "The Renewed Jihadi Terror Threat to Mauritania," *CTC Sentinel* 11, no. 7 (2018); Caleb Weiss, "Translation of a May 2006 Interview of Mokhtar Belmokhtar," The Line of Steel, July 21, 2020, http://thelineofsteel.weebly.com/sahelian-jihad/translation-of-a-may-2006-interview-of-mokhtar-belmokhtar.
22. Alex Thurston, *Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel: Local Politics and Rebel Groups* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 66.
23. "Orphans of the Sahara: Rebellion (Episode 2)," Al Jazeera English, January 17, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbGUCQ1oocg. Talha Ould Hassan al-Barbouchi is the AQIM Sahara emirate's governor of the Tombouctou Region, part of al-Qaeda's Sahelian

affiliate Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM). Al-Barbouchi is also known by several other *noms de guerre*, including Talha al-Libi, al-Mauritani and al-Azawadi.

24. Dario Cristiani, "Ten Years of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Evolution and Prospects," *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor* 15, no. 9 (2017), https://jamestown.org/program/ten-years-al-qaeda-islamic-maghreb-evolution-prospects/.
25. Richard Chelin, "From the Islamic State of Algeria to the Economic Caliphate of the Sahel: The Transformation of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2018): 11.
26. Cristiani, "Ten Years of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb."
27. Chelin, "From the Islamic State of Algeria to the Economic Caliphate of the Sahel."
28. Jama'at at-Tawhid wal-Jihad fi Gharb Ifriqiya, more commonly known by its French acronym, MUJAO (Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest).
29. The kidnapping of the humanitarians in Tindouf constituted the first operation for which the group had claimed responsibility. It was founded by Abderrahmane Ould el-Amar and Sultan Ould Bady, known by their respective *noms de guerre* as Ahmed al-Azawadi and Abu Ali, the Mauritanian Hamad Ould al-Khayri and al-Sahraoui. During the founding of MUJAO, al-Azawadi would change his *nisba* to al-Tilemsi with reference to his origins as a Tilemsi Arab of the Lemhar tribe. MUJAO's co-founder, Ould Bady, is also a Tilemsi Arab, at least partly, on his father's side from the Ahel Taleb clan originating in the area of Tamkoutate, although Ould Bady was born in Kidal with a Tuareg mother from the Taghat Mellet tribe. Tilemsi's and Ould Bady's backgrounds as smugglers are well known. Tilemsi joined AQIM in 2007 and took part in military and kidnapping operations in Mauritania, Mali, and Niger, while Ould Bady, a former Arab militiaman, joined in 2009.
30. The founding of MUJAO in 2011 was due to several causes. Firstly, the Tilemsi Arabs, Sahraouis, and some Mauritanians frowned upon the Algerian dominance within the AQIM leadership. There are also suggestions of possible differences over the uneven allocation of resources. Second, Tilemsi and Ould Bady eyed their Tuareg brethren being in the majority and leading several AQIM *kataib* (battalions) or

saraya (units) in Mali, including Seriyat Yusuf ibn Tashfin led by Sidan Ag Hitta (aka Abu Abd al-Hamid al-Kidali) and Seriyat al-Ansar led by the late Hamada Ag Amama (aka Abd al-Krim al-Targui), both active in the Kidal region. However, when Tilemsi and Ould Bady sought the blessing from the AQIM leadership to establish a *katibat* or *seriyat* composed of Azawadi Arabs, they were refused, with the explanation that it was contrary to the organization's creed and methodology, though it was also viewed as dangerous to establish and divide *kataib* or *saraya* along ethnic or tribal lines. Mohammed Mahmoud Abu al-Ma'ali, "Al-Qaeda and Its Allies in the Sahel and the Sahara," Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, April 30, 2012, https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2012/04/20124301421966601.html.

31. Ibid.; Mohammed Mahmoud Abu al-Ma'ali, "Al-Qaeda and Its Allies in the Sahel and the Sahara," Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, April 30, 2012, https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2012/04/20124301421966601.html; Lecocq, Baz and Niang, Amy (eds.) *Identités sahéliennes en temps de crise. Histoires, enjeux et perspectives*, LITPDF-Muster LIT Verlag, 2019, 85.
32. The Majlis al-Shura is the consultative council where the group's senior commanders make decisions.
33. In October 2011, MUJAO kidnapped three Europeans—an Italian, Rossella Urru, and two Spaniards, Ainhoa Fernandez de Rincon and Enric Gonyalons—from the Hassi Rabouni Camp in Tindouf, Algeria, one of the several camps where the original refugees from Western Sahara had fled in 1975, and the area where Sahraoui himself had spent time. As in the case of Mariani, Sahraoui would serve as the mastermind of the kidnapping and subsequent negotiator. Manuel Herz, "Refugee Camps of the Western Saharan," *Humanity* 4, no. 3 (2013): 371.
34. "€15 Million Paid for Hostage Release," *Journal* (Ireland), July 20, 2012, https://www.thejournal.ie/e15-million-paid-for-hostage-release-527242-Jul2012/.
35. "Who Is Adnan Abu al-Walid al-Sahraoui."
36. "Communiqué du Comité National pour le Redressement, la Démocratie et la Restauration de l'état (CNRDR)," Malijet, March 22,

2012, http://malijet.com/actualite-politique-au-mali/40599-communiqué-du-comité-national-pour-le-redressement%2C-la-démocrati.html.

37. Sergei Boeke and Giliam de Valk, "The Unforeseen 2012 Crisis in Mali: The Diverging Outcomes of Risk and Threat Analyses," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 20, no. 1 (March 29, 2019): 1–20, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1592356.
38. Ibid.
39. "Ansar Dine Islamists Destroy 'Legendary' Timbuktu Mosque," France 24, July 2, 2012, https://www.france24.com/en/20120702-mali-timbuktu-unesco-heritage-site-ansar-dine-islamists-destroy-legendary-mosque.
40. For its part, MUJAO's occupation of Gao would last seven months, ending on January 27, 2013.
41. "Nord du Mali: les islamistes du Mujao ont pris Gao, le MNLA déterminé à poursuivre le combat," Radio France Internationale, June 28, 2012, http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20120627-mali-islamistes-ont-pris-gao-mais-le-mnla-est-determine-combattre; Thomas Hofnung, "Gao libre, mais tenté par la vengeance," *Libération*, January 29, 2013, https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2013/01/29/gao-libre-mais-tente-par-la-vengeance_877783. In the town of Gao, MUJAO mustered support from the Songhai ethnic majority and, in the Gao region at large, from Arab communities who saw their business interests threatened by the Tuareg.
42. Boeke and de Valk, "The Unforeseen 2012 Crisis in Mali."
43. Chelin, "From the Islamic State of Algeria to the Economic Caliphate of the Sahel," 12.
44. Héni Nsaibia and Caleb Weiss, "Ansaroul Islam and the Growing Terrorist Insurgency in Burkina Faso," *CTC Sentinel* 11, no. 3 (2018), https://ctc.usma.edu/ansaroul-islam-growing-terrorist-insurgency-burkina-faso/.
45. The Inarabane reunion approximately coincided with a particularly deadly attack that killed nine peacekeepers of the Nigerien contingent of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) near In-Delimane, along the Ansongo-Menaka transit route. Al-Sahraoui's brother in arms and MUJAO co-founder, Sultan Ould Bady, claimed responsibility for the attack. In a

declaration to Agence France-Presse (AFP), Ould Bady stated: "In the name of all the mujahideen, we attacked the soldiers of the (Nigerien) government which works with the enemies of Islam," and further indicated that attack was a coordinated effort by saying: "three groups of mujahideen were on the [battle] field." "Mali: un jihadiste revendique l'attaque meurtrière contre l'ONU," *Jeune Afrique*, October 6, 2014, https://www.jeuneafrique.com/depeches/10922/politique/mali-un-jihadiste-revendique-lattaque-meurtriere-contre-lonu/.

46. Al-Mourabitoun was created as the result of a merger between MUJAO (of which al-Sahraoui had been a member) and another group, al-Muwaqqi'un bil-Dima (The Signatories in Blood) (of which Belmokhtar was a leader).
47. "Uncertainty over US Strike against al-Qaida Leader in Libya," Associated Press, June 15, 2015, https://apnews.com/article/b80013646d354dadbef3907523bf5150.
48. Thomas Joscelyn, "The Islamic State's Supporters Want Mokhtar Belmokhtar Dead," *FDD's Long War Journal*, August 23, 2015, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/08/the-islamic-state-wants-mokhtar-belmokhtar-dead.php.
49. Personal communication, anonymous UN official, August 2020.
50. "New Statement from Hamad Muhammad al-Amin al-Shinqiti: 'Azawadi Support for the Islamic State,'" Jihadology, July 10, 2014, https://jihadology.net/2014/07/10/new-statement-from-h.hamad-muh.hammad-al-amin-al-shinqiṭi-azawadi-support-for-the-islamic-state/.
51. "Le groupe el-Mourabitoune prête allégeance à l'Etat islamique," Al Akhbar, May, 13, 2015, http://fr.alakhbar.info/10162-0-Le-groupe-El-Mourabitoune-a-prte-allegeance-a-lEtat-islamique.xhtml#.VVO-r_y973E.twitter.
52. "El-Mourabitoune appelle les autres groupes jihadistes à prêter allégeance à l'Etat islamique (Audio)," Al Akhbar, May, 13, 2015, http://fr.alakhbar.info/10163–0-El-Mourabitone-appelle-les-autres-groupes-jihaidste-a-prter-allegeance-a-lEtat-islamique-Audio.html.
53. Aaron Y. Zelin, *Your Sons Are at Your Service: Tunisia's Missionaries of Jihad* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 244; Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram: Two Years on Shekau and Buhari Still Face Pressure over the Chibok Schoolgirls," Jamestown Foundation,

Terrorism Monitor 14, no. 10 (May 16, 2016), https://jamestown.org/program/boko-haram-two-years-on-shekau-and-buhari-still-face-pressure-over-the-chibok-schoolgirls/.

54. Aymenn J. al-Tamimi, "The 'Boko Haram' Allegiance Pledge to Islamic State: An Ansar al-Shari'a Tunisia Connection," August 8, 2018, http://www.aymennjawad.org/21476/the-boko-haram-allegiance-pledge-to-islamic-state.
55. "Mothaqaf" (@mothaqaf2018), "# Very important: for the Islamic nation and the people of Levant" (translation from Arabic), Twitter, November 12, 2017, https://twitter.com/mothaqaf2018/status/929631881099927552?s=20; Mina al-Lami, "Analysis: What Do We Know about the New Islamic State Leader?," BBC Monitoring, November 1, 2019, https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c2017bcy.
56. Ultimately, Al-Mourabitoun split less than two years after the unification with al-Sahraoui announcing the creation of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). A month after the internal imbroglio, Belmokhtar was targeted by a US airstrike at a farm south of Ajdabiya in Libya. Belmokhtar survived the airstrike, although the Ajdabiya Shura Council named seven individuals killed in the air raid ("Al-Qaeda Libya Leader Not Listed among Dead," New Arab, June 16, 2015, https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2015/6/15/mokhtar-belmokhtar-the-uncatchable-militant-killed-by-us-strike.) A month after the air raid in Ajdabiya, the Islamic State in Libya published a kill list including Belmokhtar, whom the Islamic State wanted dead for fighting alongside the Shura Council of Mujahideen in Derna (MSCD) together with other al-Qaeda-aligned militants against the Islamic State in Derna. Joscelyn, "The Islamic State's Supporters Want Mokhtar Belmokhtar Dead."
57. "Bel Mokhtar dément l'allégeance du groupe el-Mourabitoune à l'Etat islamique," Al Akhbar, May 15, 2015, http://www.fr.alakhbar.info/10168-0-Bel-Mokhtar-dement-lallegeance-du-groupe-El-Mourabitoune-a-lEtat-Islamique.html.
58. "Mali: l'émir d'al-Mourabitoune gravement blessé dans des affrontements," *El Watan*, June 17, 2015, https://www.elwatan.com/edition/actualite/info-el-watan-mali-lemir-

dal-mourabitoune-gravement-blesse-dans-des-affrontements-17–06–2015.

59. Ruth Maclean, "Niger Islamic State Hostage: 'They Want to Kill Foreign Soldiers,'" *The Guardian*, June 5, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/05/hostage-niger-islamic-state-group-they-want-to-kill-foreign-soldiers.
60. Ibid. A majority of vehicles used by militants are Toyota Land Cruiser pickup trucks, and not Hiluxes.
61. "ISIS Calls for Attacks in Morocco and Western Sahara" (translated from Arabic), Al Jazeera, 4 May, 2016, https://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2016/5/4/.
62. "L'organisation Etat islamique revendique sa première attaque en Afrique," Al Akhbar, September 3, 2016, http://www.fr.alakhbar.info/11765-0-Lorganisation-Etat-Islamique-revendique-sa-premiere-attaque-en-Afrique.html.
63. Ibid.
64. Boureima Balima, "Niger Security Forces Repel Attack on Prison Holding Militant," Reuters, October 17, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-security/niger-security-forces-repel-attack-on-prison-holding-militants-idUSKBN12H0PF.
65. "Gunmen Attack Niger Prison Holding Extremists, 1 Dead," Voice of America, October 17, 2016, https://www.voanews.com/a/gunmen-attack-niger-prison-holding-extremists/3554590.html. Of note is the apparent difficulties ISGS had to connect to IS Central while cohabiting the high security prison of Koutoukalé with Diffa-based militants from Boko Haram and Islamic State in the West Africa Province (ISWAP).
66. David Smith, "More than 700 Inmates Escape during Attack on Nigerian Prison," *The Guardian*, September 8, 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/sep/08/muslim-extremists-escape-nigeria-prison. For an extensive discussion of Islamists' contemporary use of prison breaks, see Bennet Clifford and Caleb Weiss, "'Breaking the Walls' Goes Global: The Evolving Threat of Jihadi Prison Assaults and Riots," *CTC Sentinel* 13, no. 2 (February 27, 2020), https://ctc.usma.edu/breaking-walls-goes-global-evolving-threat-jihadi-prison-assaults-riots/.
67. Balima, "Niger Security Forces Repel Attack on Prison Holding Militant"; "Niger: l'Etat islamique revendique l'attaque contre la prison

de Koutoukalé (Actualisé)," Al Akhbar, October 18, 2016, http://www.fr.alakhbar.info/11849-0-Niger-lEtat-Islamique-revendique-lattaque-contre-la-prison-de-Koutoukalé-Actualise.html.

68. Clifford and Weiss, "'Breaking the Walls' Goes Global."
69. Amaq News Agency, October 30, 2016.
70. Author correspondence, Abdul Wahid, April 2019.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Maclean, "Niger Islamic State Hostage." According to ISGS at the time, the group had closer to 1,200 fighters, an assertion that was highly disputed.
74. He is more commonly known as Petit Chafori.
75. As with many senior Fulani cadres within ISGS, Chafori was a former Fulani militiaman. He was among those who joined AQIM/MUJAO. Chafori has also been described as a lieutenant of Iyad Ag Ghaly, the leader of Ansar Dine, in the Mali–Niger borderlands. In mid-2017, Chafori was among the JNIM members who defected and joined ISGS.
76. This individual was identified as Abdoulaye Cheibou.
77. This individual was identified as Boureima Hama.
78. Fulfulde is the Fulani language.
79. Author correspondence, Abdul Wahid, April 2019.
80. Pauline Le Roux, "Exploiting Borders in the Sahel: The Islamic State in the Greater Sahel," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, June 10, 2019, https://africacenter.org/spotlight/exploiting-borders-sahel-islamic-state-in-the-greater-sahara-isgs/.
81. Maclean, "Niger Islamic State Hostage."
82. Boeke and de Valk, "The Unforeseen 2012 Crisis in Mali."
83. Maclean, "Niger Islamic State Hostage."
84. "Liptako-Gourma: Epicentre of the Sahel Crisis?," ReliefWeb, June 30, 2017, https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/liptako-gourma-epicentre-sahel-crisis.
85. Ibid.; Eric Schmitt and Rukmini Callimachi, "Niger Ambush Suspect May Be in Custody, Officials Say," *New York Times*, April 16, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/16/world/africa/niger-ambush-doundoun-cheffou.html.
86. Maclean, "Niger Islamic State Hostage."
87. Le Roux, "Exploiting Borders in the Sahel."

88. "Union des jihadistes contre la force du G5 Sahel, selon un groupe se réclamant de l'EI," *L'Orient-Le Jour*, January 1, 2013, https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1094189/union-des-jihadistes-contre-la-force-du-g5-sahel-selon-un-groupe-se-reclamant-de-lei.html.
89. Schmitt and Callimachi, "Niger Ambush Suspect May Be in Custody, Officials Say."
90. "Daech cherche à s'étendre en Afrique," *Le Figaro*, March 16, 2017, https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2017/03/16/01003–20170316ARTFIG00266-daech-cherche-a-s-etendre-en-afrique.php. However, the person in question who actually may have gotten married in that village could be one of al-Sahraoui's commanders, namely Higo al-Maghribi (or Abu Huzeifa), who also is known to be married and have children with a Fulani woman. Author correspondence, Moussa Ag Acharatoumane, April 2019.
91. Author correspondence, Moussa Ag Acharatoumane, April 2019.
92. Le Roux, "Exploiting Borders in the Sahel."
93. Despite their cooperation with it, Moussa Ag Acharatoumane was quick to emphasize that they do not receive funding from Barkhane: "Contrary to what is said, we receive no munitions—much less arms—from Barkhane. Our arms are purchased on our own: MSA is well armed, thanks to funds issued from the community." And to rebut another fallacy, "No, we are not implicated in the drug trade, and no, we receive no money from the state. We have gotten our arms and our weapons by our own means." Author correspondence, Moussa Ag Acharatoumane, April 2019.
94. Indeed, after intense counterterror campaigns between February and April 2018, ISGS suffered what one analyst called a "quasi-breakdown" in its structure. Emblematic of this break was the August 2018 announcement that the commander of ISGS's constituent Katibat Salaheddine, named Ould Bady, had turned himself in.
95. Pierre Alonso and Célian Macé, "Moussa, l'arme de Paris au Sahel," *Libération*, April 13, 2018, https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2018/04/13/moussa-l-arme-de-paris-au-sahel_1643338/.
96. When the authors asked Moussa Ag Acharatoumane, the leader of MSA, about these abuses, his response was clear: "I always have the same response: these are allegations that we have always denied, and

proof of them has never been brought forward. We are a movement that works with national and international forces, and like them, we are respectful of human rights. Errors can occur and no war on earth is totally clean. We hold ourselves accountable and are ready to correct any proven error: that's our doctrine." Author correspondence, Moussa Ag Acharatoumane, April 2019.

97. Ibid.
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid.
100. Maclean, "Niger Islamic State Hostage."
101. Author correspondence, Moussa Ag Acharatoumane, April 2019.
102. This practice has been particularly pronounced in the group's core area of In-Ates. "Le journal du 19 octobre 2018," Studio Kalangou, October 19, 2018, https://www.studiokalangou.org/index.php/journaux/10703-le-journal-du-19-octobre-2018.
103. For instance, Sultan Ould Bady, who surrendered in Algeria in August 2018, was involved in such revenue-generating activities for ISGS. "Eighth Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of United Nations Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat," United Nations Security Council, February 1, 2019, https://undocs.org/S/2019/103.
104. Lizzie Dearden, "American Aid Worker Jeffery Woodke Kidnapped by Suspected Islamists in Niger," *The Independent*, October 15, 2016, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/american-aid-worker-jeffery-woodke-kidnapped-abducted-islamists-niger-mali-aqim-al-qaeda-al-a7363771.html.
105. "German National Kidnapped in Western Niger: Niger Attorney General," Reuters, April 11, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-niger-security-germany/german-national-kidnapped-in-western-niger-niger-attorney-general-idUSKBN1HI38N.
106. For an overview of the funding activities of the universe of jihadi groups in the Sahara and Sahel, see William Assanvo, "Is Organised Crime Fuelling Terror Groups in Liptako-Gourma?," Institute for Security Studies, https://issafrica.org/iss-today/is-organised-crime-fuelling-terror-groups-in-liptako-gourma.

107. Menastream (@Menastream), "#Sahel: #ISGS diffused 2 self-produced execution videos, victims beheaded w/ machete, 1st accused of sorcery & probably a marabout abducted May 19 in Ouami (Hombori-#Mali); 2nd would be the village chief of Takrouzat (Goroual-#Niger) abducted June 11 & found south of Tessit, Mali," Twitter, July 13, 2019, https://twitter.com/Menastream/status/1150047510402097152?s=20.
108. "Sidelining the Islamic State in Niger's Tillabery," International Crisis Group, no. 289, June 2020, 6, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/289-sidelining-islamic-state-nigers-tillabery.
109. For instance, in January 2020, ISGS claimed responsibility for the November 2019 forced evictions of the populations in four villages in eastern Burkina Faso. See *Al-Naba*, issue 216, https://jihadology.net/2020/01/09/new-issue-of-the-islamic-states-newsletter-al-naba-216/; "Terrorisme: terreur sur l'axe Fada-Pama," *L'Observateur Paalga*, December 3, 2019, http://www.lobservateur.bf/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=4510.
110. Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Helene Cooper, "US Identifies 3 ISIS Militants Who Led Deadly Ambush in Niger," *New York Times*, May 29, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/29/us/politics/isis-militants-ambush-niger.html.
111. "Burkina Faso: le groupe État islamique dans le grand Sahara (EIGS) revendique enlèvement et tuerie," *Notre Afrik*, April 18, 2018, http://www.notreafrik.com/burkina-faso-le-groupe-etat-islamique-dans-le-grand-sahara-eigs-revendique-enlevement-et-tuerie/.
112. Author correspondence, Abdul Wahid, April 2019.
113. Ibid.
114. Maclean, "Niger Islamic State Hostage."
115. Author correspondence, Abdul Wahid, April 2019.
116. Ibid.
117. Ibid.
118. "Attacks Claimed by the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)," Menastream, June 23, 2018, http://menastream.com/attacks-islamic-state-greater-sahara/. The Nigerien reaction to the deadly ambush in Tirzawane was to call for French support. France responded by

deploying an eighty-man team, including special operations forces to Ouallam.

119. In response to the Abala attack, French, Nigerien and Malian forces and the local militias MSA and GATIA coordinated a response and intercepted the attackers, eliminating most of the assailants. This coordinated response was the first of its kind, a multilateral approach that would be adopted to counter the group. The consequence of these changing dynamics on the ground, and the rise of the MSA and GATIA alliance, was that it spurred some Tolebe in Mali to return home to Tillabéri, feeling that their communities were threatened.
120. Héni Nsaibia and Rida Lyammouri, "Digital Dunes and Shrublands: A Comparative Introduction to the Sahelian Jihadi Propaganda Ecosystem," GNET, October 27, 2020, https://gnet-research.org/2020/10/27/digital-dunes-and-shrublands-a-comparative-introduction-to-the-sahelian-jihadi-propaganda-ecosystem/.
121. The first instance of an IS dissemination of ISGS material occurred on April 12, 2019, when it claimed an ISGS assassination of an MSA officer and his associate in In-Kiringya, south of Menaka. Menastream (@Menastream), "#Mali: #ISIS follows up with Amaq report for yesterday's event in In-Kiringya, #Ménaka," Twitter, April 12, 2019, https://twitter.com/Menastream/status/1116780126254043136.
122. Héni Nsaibia, "Targeting of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara," ACLED, 21 March 2018, https://acleddata.com/2018/03/21/targeting-of-the-islamic-state-in-the-greater-sahara-isgs/.
123. For instance, Ansaroul Islam, a newly potent jihadi group in Burkina Faso's north, was reported by several news outlets to be on the verge of pledging allegiance to the ISGS in December 2017. However, this pledge never materialized. "Burkina Faso: Ansaroul Islam Pledging Allegiance to the Islamic State? Maybe or Maybe Not," Menastream, April 16, 2017, http://menastream.com/burkina-faso-ansaroul-islam-pledging-allegiance-to-the-islamic-state-maybe-or-maybe-not/. A significant part of the discourse surrounding Ansaroul Islam has been whether it has aligned with ISGS or JNIM. Although at its inception Ansaroul Islam had shown evidence that it was working alongside the then-nascent JNIM coalition associated with AQ, by April 2017 incessant rumors emanating from Libya began to circulate suggesting that a Burkinabe jihadi (presumably Ansaroul Islam) group would soon

pledge allegiance (*bayah*) to the Islamic State. Burkinabe security sources also reported that Ansaroul Islam had manifested its intention to give an oath of allegiance to the Islamic State. The Mauritanian news outlet Al Akhbar followed suit and reported that Dicko's group, in the article referred to as "Ançar Allah," intended to give an oath of allegiance to the Islamic State, although stated that it was unclear if the oath was to be given directly to al-Baghdadi or to (as stated) the "Islamic State in West Africa" led by al-Sahraoui, citing the outlet's sources. The closest evidence of affiliation came in late December 2017, when presumed Ansaroul Islam militants attacked the gendarmerie in Aribinda, Burkina Faso, reportedly leaving a written message saying "Islamic State—Malam Dicko," amplifying the previous rumors that Ansaroul Islam claimed affiliation with the Islamic State. However, to date, no formal pledge of allegiance of Ansaroul Islam to ISGS has ever materialized. Interview, journalist Ndiaga Thiam, April 2017; "Burkina Faso: le groupe Ançar Allah va rejoindre l'Etat islamique," Al Akhbar, April 15, 2017, http://www.fr.alakhbar.info/12494-0-Burkina-Faso-le-groupe-Ancar-Allah-va-rejoindre-lEtat-Islamique.html; "Sahel: la brigade de gendarmerie d'Aribinda attaquée et une revendication laissée sur les lieux," Infowakata, December 21, 2017, https://infowakat.net/sahel-brigade-de-gendarmerie-daribinda-attaquee-revendication-laissee-lieux.

124. See, for example, Andrew Lebovich, "The Real Reason US Troops Are in Niger," *Foreign Policy*, October 27, 2017, https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/10/27/the-real-reason-u-s-troops-are-in-niger/.
125. Nick Turse, "The US Is Building a Drone Base in Niger That Will Cost More than $280 Million by 2024," Intercept, October 21, 2018, https://theintercept.com/2018/08/21/us-drone-base-niger-africa/.
126. Kyle Rempfer, "Completion of US Drone Base in Niger to Be Delayed," *Air Force Times*, November 19, 2018, https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2018/11/19/completion-of-us-drone-base-in-niger-to-be-delayed/.
127. "Mali: French Forces Killed ISGS Commander Involved in Tongo Tongo Ambush," Menastream, August 27, 2018, http://menastream.com/mali-barkhane-isgs-menaka/.

128. The NGO was called Jeunesse en Mission Entraide et Développement (JEMED), and was a branch of the US-based organization Youth with a Mission (YWAM). "Nigeriens Call for Jeff Woodke's Release, 2 Years after His Abduction," Friends in the West, https://friendsinthewest.com/tag/jeunesse-en-mission-entraide-et-developpement-je.
129. Lizzie Dearden, "American Aid Worker Abducted from Home in Niger," *The Independent*, October 15, 2016, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/american-aid-worker-jeffery-woodke-kidnapped-abducted-islamists-niger-mali-aqim-al-qaeda-al-a7363771.html.
130. Locating and rescuing American hostages is of particular importance, since, as researchers at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point have noted, American hostages are four times more likely to be killed while in captivity as compared to hostages of other nationalities. Daniel Milton and Seth Loertscher, *Held Hostage: Analyses of Kidnapping across Time and among Jihadist Organizations* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2015), https://ctc.usma.edu/held-hostage-analyses-of-kidnapping-across-time-and-among-jihadist-organizations/.
131. However, as of May 2018, Cheffou's codename had become Objective Urchin Reef. Gibbons-Neff and Cooper, "US Identifies 3 ISIS Militants Who Led Deadly Ambush in Niger."
132. "The group was an Army Special Forces team called Operational Detachment-Alpha Team 3212. It had been operating in Niger for about a month." Rukmini Callimachi et al., "'An Endless War': Why 4 US Soldiers Died in a Remote African Desert," *New York Times*, February 20, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/02/17/world/africa/niger-ambush-american-soldiers.html.
133. Gibbons-Neff and Cooper, "US Identifies 3 ISIS Militants Who Led Deadly Ambush in Niger."
134. Callimachi et al., "'An Endless War.'"
135. According to the Pentagon video, the team included eight US Special Operations soldiers, two US Special Operations support personnel, one intelligence contractor, one Nigerien interpreter, thirty-one Nigerien partner forces, and a three-man Nigerien reconnaissance team.
136. Callimachi et al., "'An Endless War.'"

137. Ibid.
138. Ibid.
139. “Pentagon Animation Shows Re-creation of Niger Ambush.”
140. Callimachi et al. “‘An Endless War.’”
141. “Pentagon Animation Shows Re-creation of Niger Ambush.”
142. Callimachi et al., “‘An Endless War.’”
143. In April 2018, Nigerien defense officials told US officials that they had finally captured Cheffou, though this turned out to be incorrect. Gibbons-Neff and Cooper, “US Identifies 3 ISIS Militants Who Led Deadly Ambush in Niger.”
144. “Pentagon Animation Shows Re-creation of Niger Ambush.”
145. Monica Mark, “Inside the Botched Raid That Left Four US Soldiers Dead in Niger,” BuzzFeed, December 9, 2017, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/monicamark/niger-secret-wars-in-africa.
146. James Meek, “US Soldiers Killed in Niger Were Outgunned, ‘Left Behind’ in Hunt for ISIS Leader,” ABC News, May 3, 2018, https://abcnews.go.com/International/us-soldiers-killed-niger-outgunned-left-hunt-isis/story?id=54909240.
147. Meek, “Inside the Botched Raid That Left Four U.S. Soldiers Dead in Niger.”
148. As the Pentagon video shows, the engagement with elders lasted significantly longer—about thirty minutes longer—than the commander had expected. Indeed, it would later be suggested that the leader of the village was stalling the American troops while members of ISGS were alerted of the Americans’ presence, and moved into position. “Pentagon Animation Shows Re-creation of Niger Ambush.”
149. Callimachi et al., “‘An Endless War.’”
150. Jack Moore, “US Soldiers Were Set Up for Ambush by ISIS-Sympathetic Village in Niger, Officials Say,” *Newsweek*, October 24, 2017, https://www.newsweek.com/us-soldiers-were-set-isis-sympathetic-village-niger-ambush-officials-say-691361.
151. While the exact contours of collaboration between ISGS and village elders remain opaque, the village chief was arrested by Nigerien authorities, and found to have phone numbers that tied him to Cheffou. Schmitt and Callimachi, “Niger Ambush Suspect May Be in Custody, Officials Say.”

152. "Pentagon Animation Shows Re-creation of Niger Ambush."
153. Ibid.
154. Ibid.
155. Ibid.
156. Paul Sonne and Dan Lamothe, "Missing for 48 Hours: Pentagon Details Army Sergeant's Final Moments in Niger," *Washington Post*, May 12, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/missing-for-48-hours-pentagon-details-army-sergeants-final-moments/2018/05/11/343e7802–548e-11e8-b00a-17f9fda3859b_story.html?utm_term=.4da907dc3844.
157. "Pentagon Animation Shows Re-creation of Niger Ambush."
158. Ibid.
159. The four Nigerien soldiers killed that day were Bagué Soumana, Abdoul Rachid Yerimah, Yacouba Issoufou, and Goubé Mahamadou Issaka.
160. The Pentagon has said that the American team involved in the ambush killed twenty to twenty-five militants. "Pentagon Animation Shows Re-creation of Niger Ambush."
161. Menastream (@Menastream), "#Mali: According to #Mauritania-n news agency ANI, #ISGS/al-Sahraoui claimed responsibility for a number of attacks including the attack against #US forces in Tongo Tongo …," Twitter, January 12, 2018, https://twitter.com/Menastream/status/951885089629229057.
162. Rukmini Callimachi, "ISIS Affiliate Claims October Attack on US Troops in Niger," *New York Times*, January 13, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/13/world/africa/niger-isis-green-berets-attack.html.
163. Another notable feature of the video was still photos showing Katibat Salaheddine under the command of Sultan Ould Bady and Tolebe defectors from Katibat Macina led by Amadou Koufa pledging allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, consequently joining the Islamic State or rather its local affiliate, ISGS.
164. Maclean, "Niger Islamic State Hostage."
165. Schmitt and Callimachi, "Niger Ambush Suspect May Be in Custody, Officials Say."
166. "Islamic State in the Greater Sahel," Center for International Security and Cooperation, last updated July 2018,

https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/islamic-state-greater-sahara#highlight_text_8363.

167. "Suspected Jihadists in Mali Kill More than 40 in Two Days of Violence," *The Guardian*, April 28, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/29/suspected-jihadists-in-mali-kill-more-than-40-in-two-days-of-violence.
168. "Terrorisme: le 'groupe EI dans le Grand Sahara' sur la liste noire américaine," Radio France Internationale, May 18, 2018, http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20180518-terrorisme-sahel-etats-unis-groupe-etat-islamique-grand-sahara-listWe-noire.
169. For an overview of JNIM's goals, via its so-called playbook, see Jami Forbes, "Revisiting the Mali al-Qaida Playbook: How the Group Is Advancing on Its Goals in the Sahel," *CTC Sentinel* 11, no. 9 (2018), https://ctc.usma.edu/revisiting-mali-al-qaida-playbook-group-advancing-goals-sahel.
170. These groups included Ansar Dine, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, al-Mourabitoun, and the Macina Liberation Front.
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172. Héni Nsaibia and Caleb Weiss. "The End of the Sahelian Anomaly: How the Global Conflict between the Islamic State and al-Qaida Finally Came to West Africa," *CTC Sentinel* 13, no. 7 (July 31, 2020): 3–14.
173. Also known as Okacha.
174. Nathalie Guibert and Madjid Zerrouky, "Les nouvelles menaces contre la France de l'émir d'Al-Qaida au Sahel," *Le Monde*, January 12, 2016, https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2016/01/12/les-nouvelles-menaces-contre-la-france-de-l-emir-d-al-qaida-au-sahel_4846015_3210.html.
175. "Sahel: Iyad Ag Ghaly tente-t-il un rapprochement avec Abou Walid al-Sahraoui?," *Jeune Afrique*, February 15, 2018, https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/529517/politique/sahel-iyad-ag-ghali-tente-un-rapprochement-avec-letat-islamique/; "Burkina Faso: le

groupe État islamique dans le grand Sahara (EIGS) revendique enlèvement et tuerie."

176. Author correspondence, Abdul Wahid, April 2019.
177. Ibid.
178. "Union of Jihadists against the Force of the G5 Sahel, According to a Group Claiming to Be ISIS," *L'Orient-Le Jour*, January 13, 2018, https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1094189/union-des-jihadistes-contre-la-force-du-g5-sahel-selon-un-groupe-se-reclamant-de-lei.html.
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180. "Face à Barkhane, un ennemi aux abois," *L'Express*, April 20, 2018, "https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/afrique/face-a-barkhane-un-ennemi-aux-abois_2001343.html.
181. Ibid.
182. Moreover, despite having the same general enemies—the G-5 Sahel and Barkhane—the two groups have notable differences. For one, ISGS tends to recruit more from the Fulani ethnic group, while JNIM focuses more on the Tuareg. Second, the two groups take relatively different approaches to populations in their areas of operation. As one French commander said, the difference is that ISGS practices "brutal predation" while JNIM practices the more conciliatory tactic of installing and ingratiating itself—or "rooting" itself—in local communities.
183. Among the few videos that have been produced by ISGS, there are "Ghazwa Tongo Tongo," "Ghazwa Ayorou," "Punishments of Traitors," "Ambush by Soldiers of the Caliphate against Soldiers from the 'Apostate' Movement for the Salvation of Azawad," and "The Battle of Taranguit: Soldiers of the 'Caliphate State' Attack the 'Apostate' Movement for the Salvation of Azawad." See "Attacks Claimed by the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)," Menastream, June 23, 2018, http://menastream.com/attacks-islamic-state-greater-sahara/. Exceptions include IS Central's release of ISGS's *bayah* and releases on Telegram of the Tongo Tongo attack.

184. Caleb Weiss, "Islamic State Releases First Combat Video from Mali," *FDD's Long War Journal*, April 3, 2019, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/04/islamic-state-releases-first-combat-video-from-mali.php.
185. Ibid.
186. Luca Raineri, "If Victims Become Perpetrators," International Alert, June 2018, https://www.international-alert.org/publications/if-victims-become-perpetrators-violent-extremism-sahel.
187. "Mapping Armed Groups in Mali and the Sahel," European Council on Foreign Relations, May 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/mena/sahel_mapping/isgs.
188. Héni Nsaibia, "Islamic State in Burkina Faso," Menastream, March 23, 2019, http://menastream.com/islamic-state-in-burkina-faso/.
189. Maclean, "Niger Islamic State Hostage."
190. *Al-Naba*, issue 175, https://jihadology.net/2019/03/28/new-issue-of-the-islamic-states-newsletter-al-naba-175/. While Staff Sergeant Dustin Wright was killed in Tongo Tongo, it remains unclear how Johar Figaro Nelson's identity card ended up in the hands of ISGS fighters during the same ambush, but it was presumably left behind at the site. Woodman was abducted at a mining site in Tiabongou and subsequently executed near Beiga, in Burkina Faso.
191. Weiss, "Islamic State Releases First Combat Video from Mali."
192. "Niger Ambush: Militants Kill 28 Soldiers near Mali," BBC, May 16, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48286975.
193. Ibid.
194. This attack on Nigerien soldiers is indicative of the broader shift in ISGS's targeting, which saw the group increasingly focus on attacking Niger, not Mali, beginning in March 2019. "Heeding the Call."
195. "Regional Overview: Africa 21 May 2019," ACLED, May 21, 2019, https://www.acleddata.com/2019/05/21/regional-overview-africa-21-may-2019/.
196. Le Roux, "Exploiting Borders in the Sahel."
197. "Mali-Burkina: interdiction pour les combattants de l'EIGS d'écouter les audios de Amadou Koufa," *Nord Sud Journal*, October 18, 2019, https://www.nordsudjournal.com/mali-burkina-interdiction-pour-les-combattants-de-lorganisation-etat-islamique-decouter-les-audios-de-amadou-koufa-de-al-qaida/.

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8. THE ISLAMIC STATE IN SOMALIA

1. Jane Perlez, "Chaotic Somalia Starves as Strongmen Battle," *New York Times*, October 4, 1992, https://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/04/world/chaotic-somalia-starves-as-strongmen-battle.html.
2. Benedikt Franke, *Security Cooperation in Africa: A Reappraisal* (Boulder, CO: FirstForumPress, 2002, 77.
3. Matthew Thomas, "Exposing and Exploiting Weaknesses in the Merger of Al-Qaeda and l-Shabaab," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 24, no. 3 (2013): 413–435.
4. John Rollins, "Al Qaeda and Affiliates: Historical Perspective, Global Presence, and Implications for US Policy," CRS Report no. R41070, Congressional Research Service, Washington, DC, January 25, 2011, 24, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/R41070.pdf.
5. For a detailed history of clans in Somalia, see G.J. Abbink, *The Total Somali Clan Genealogy* (Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2009).
6. Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamic Group 2005–2012* (New York: Oxford, 2013), 7.
7. Barak Mendelsohn, *The al-Qaeda Franchise: The Expansion of al-Qaeda and Its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2016), 141.
8. Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 10.
9. For by far the most thorough account to date on the emergence and evolution of AMISOM, see Paul Williams, *Fighting for Peace in*

Somalia: A History and Analysis of the African Union Mission (AMISOM), 2007–2017 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

10. "Harsh War, Harsh Peace Abuses by al-Shabaab, the Transitional Federal Government and AMISOM in Somalia," Human Rights Watch, April 19, 2010, 2, https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/04/19/harsh-war-harsh-peace/abuses-al-shabaab-transitional-federal-government-and.
11. According to a 2018 assessment of AMSIOM's effectiveness, "AMISOM has struggled to destroy rather than just displace Al-Shabaab's core combat capabilities," and when going into al-Shabaab controlled territory, "it has sometimes struggled to genuinely 'clear' the area of hostile elements." Paul Williams, Michele D'Alessandro, Linda Darkwa, Cedric de Coning, Amina Helal, James Machakaire and Natasja Rupesinghe, "Assessing the Effectiveness of the African Union Mission in Somalia AMISOM," Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network Report 1, December 2018, 98.
12. Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 7.
13. Ibid., 24.
14. Caleb Weiss has offered a useful discussion of the 1990s al-Shabaab video that was released in July 2017. In the video, as Weiss says, "Karate, as well as Shabaab spokesman Ali Mahmoud Rage, report that several al-Qaeda leaders were present during the infamous 'Black Hawk Down' incident in Mogadishu in 1993." Personal correspondence, Caleb Weiss, January 2020.
15. Nuruddin Farah, "How al-Qaeda Chief Osama bin Laden Sowed Seed of Somalia's Woes," *Daily Nation*, December 23, 2017, https://www.nation.co.kehttps://www.nation.co.ke/kenya/news/africa/how-al-qaeda-chief-osama-bin-laden-sowed-seed-of-somalia-s-woes-1248338.
16. Thomas, "Exposing and Exploiting Weaknesses in the Merger of Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab," 414.
17. Farah, "How al-Qaeda Chief Osama bin Laden Sowed Seed of Somalia's Woes."
18. Author correspondence, Matt Bryden, January 2020.
19. Ibid.
20. To this end, Hansen suggests that al-Shabaab was able to maintain unity by resurrecting the notion of a caliphate, focusing on justice and charity, and framing its ideological battle through the lens of a "clash of

civilizations" in the vein of Samuel Huntington, and corruption of the UN-backed TFG. Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 5.

21. To the extent that al-Shabaab, the ICU, and AIAI have always been in the al-Qaeda orbit, a video was released in July 2017 detailing this lineage between the groups and figures therein. See https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zHU9oeDGwZqmFoZoJ32BJjZgM_jssaat_LWxiLjLYc8/edit.
22. "Mother Demands to See Nabhan's Body," Al Jazeera, September 16, 2009, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2009/9/16/mother-demands-to-see-nabhans-body.
23. Mendelsohn, "*Al-Qaeda's Franchise*," 140.
24. Mendelsohn, *The al-Qaeda Franchise*,142.
25. Ibid., 140.
26. Ibid., 140–141. Barak Mendelsohn has argued that on the surface, al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda were not natural bedfellows: al-Qaeda remained interested in attacking the far enemy, while al-Shabaab was profoundly rooted and engaged in local Somali politics.
27. As quoted in ibid., 140–144.
28. Assaf Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad: Understanding Cooperation among Terrorist Actors*, Columbia Studies in Terrorism and Irregular Warfare (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 147.
29. Hiraal Institute, "The Islamic State in East Africa," July 2018, 7.
30. As Brenda Mugeci Githing'u has noted, members of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) sent a message as early as December 2009 to congratulate the members of al-Shabaab on forming Al-Kataib Media. See "Statement from the Islamic State of Iraq: 'Congratulations to the Brothers in Somalia with Announcing al-Katãi'b Media,'" Jihadology, December 30, 2009, https://jihadology.net/?s=Congratulations+to+the+Brothers+in+Somalia.
31. Jason Warner and Caleb Weiss, "A Legitimate Challenger? Assessing the Rivalry between al-Shabaab and the Islamic State in Somalia," *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 10 (2017): 28, https://ctc.usma.edu/a-legitimate-challenger-assessing-the-rivalry-between-al-shabaab-and-the-islamic-state-in-somalia/.
32. Ibid.
33. "The Islamic State in East Africa,"

34. Harun Maruf, "Al-Qaida or Islamic State? Issue Simmers within al-Shabab," VOA News, November 30, 2015, https://www.voanews.com/africa/al-qaida-or-islamic-state-issue-simmers-within-al-shabab.
35. "Shabaab: We'll Cut the Throats of Those Who Shift to ISIS," News24, November 24, 2015, https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/shabaab-well-cut-the-throats-of-those-who-shift-to-isis-20151124.; Conor Gaffey, "ISIS or al-Qaeda? Somalia's al-Shabab Divided over Allegiance," *Newsweek*, November 25, 2015, https://www.newsweek.com/isis-or-al-qaeda-somalias-al-shabab-divided-over-allegiance-397772.
36. See Warner and Weiss, "A Legitimate Challenger?," 28; Thomas Joscelyn, "American Jihadist Reportedly Flees al-Qaeda's Crackdown in Somalia," *FDD's Long War Journal*, December 8, 2015, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/12/american-jihadist-reportedly-flees-al-qaedas-crackdown-in-somalia.php.
37. As Warner and Weiss have recounted: "Soon after the overtures from the Islamic State began, in September 2015, Al-Shabaab arrested five of its own pro-Islamic State members in Jamame, a town in the Lower Jubba Region. In October 2015, the Amniyat arrested at least 30 more pro-Islamic State Al-Shabaab fighters. A month later in November 2015, Al-Shabaab executed five former leaders of the group, including Hussein Abdi Gedi, who was formerly Shabaab's deputy emir for the Middle Jubba Region but who had recently become the leader of a small pro-Islamic State faction based there. Later in November 2015, the Amniyat initiated large-scale arrests of Al-Shabaab members with Islamic State sympathies across southern Somalia in the towns of Jilib, Saakow, Jamame, Hagar, and Qunyo Barrow, including some foreign fighters from Egypt and Morocco. Fast forward to late March 2017, and Al-Shabaab reportedly executed at least five Kenyan members of the group for pledging allegiance to the Islamic State in the Hiraan region, and a month later, two prominent Al-Shabaab commanders, Said Bubul and Abdul Karim, were also executed for switching their allegiances." Warner and Weiss, "A Legitimate Challenger?," 28.
38. Warner and Weiss, "A Legitimate Challenger?," 28.
39. "A Message from the Mujahideen of West Africa to the Mujahideen of Somalia," IS West Africa media office, October 14, 2015.

40. See, for instance, the case of Sudanese foreign fighter Jim'ale, who pledged allegiance to the Islamic State while he was serving as a trainer for al-Shabaab in Somalia. "The Islamic State in East Africa," 7.
41. Ibid., 7. At a group level, al-Shabaab was also known to respect al-Zarqawi and AQI. Indeed, it would continue to hold this admiration for AQI even when the leader of al-Qaeda Central, al-Zawahiri, excommunicated AQI from the al-Qaeda family in February 2014, instead deeming Jolani's Jabhat al-Nusra to be the legitimate al-Qaeda branch in Iraq. For his part, the leader of al-Shabaab, Ahmed Abdi Godane, made no public statement either in support of or contradictory to al-Qaeda's decision to unseat al-Zarqawi as al-Qaeda's representative in Iraq.
42. Warner and Weiss, "A Legitimate Challenger?"
43. Marco Giannangeli, "British Jihadi Bids to Be Leader of Islamic State," *Daily Express*, July 16, 2017, https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/829100/ISIS-news-UK-latest-leader-dead-Islamic-State-new-leadership.
44. Ibid.; Viktor Marsai, "Scramble for the Horn of Africa: Al-Shabaab vs. Islamic State," Center for Defense and Strategic Studies, Budapest, 2018, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323016786_Viktor_MARSAI_Scramble_for_the_Horn_of_Africa-Al-Shabaab_vs_Islamic_State.
45. Audio released from the al-Shabaab conference, "We are all Osama bin Laden," can be found here: "New Audio Released from Ḥarakat al-Shabāb al-Mujāhidīn's Conference: 'We Are All Usāmah bin Lāden,'" Jihadology, May 12, 2011, https://jihadology.net/2011/05/12/new-audio-released-from-%E1%B8%A5arakat-al-shabab-al-mujahidins-conference-we-are-all-usamah-bin-laden/.
46. Ibid. For images of Mumin released by AS in 2011 and 2012 at its public events (including meetings with local clan elders and contests and competitions), see Ibn Siqilli, "In Pictures: Some Harakat al-Shabab Leaders, a Photo Essay Sourced from Insurgent Media: Part 2," Al-Wasat, October 5, 2011, https://thewasat.wordpress.com/2011/10/05/in-pictures-some-harakat-al-shabab-leaders-a-photo-essay-sourced-from-insurgent-media/; Ibn Siqilli, "In Pictures: Somali's Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahideen, a Photo Essay Sourced from Insurgent Media: Part 3," Al-Wasat,

December 4, 2011, https://thewasat.wordpress.com/2011/12/04/in-pictures-somalias-harakat-al-shabab-al-mujahideen-a-photo-essay-sourced-from-insurgent-media-part-3/; Ibn Siqilli, "In Pictures: Somali's Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahideen, a Photo Essay Sourced from Insurgent Media: Part 4," Al-Wasat, January 27, 2012, https://thewasat.wordpress.com/2012/01/27/1184/. We thank Christopher Anzalone for this insight.

47. Patrick Hubbard notes, however, that although eventual al-Shabaab operative and smuggler Mohamed Said Atom had been in the Golis mountains during this time, his alleged role as a facilitator for al-Shabaab does not necessarily indicate an "al-Shabaab presence" in the Golis mountains then. Author correspondence, Patrick Hubbard, June 2020.
48. Author correspondence, Matt Bryden, January 2020.
49. Marsai, "Scramble for the Horn of Africa," 5.
50. Ibid.
51. For more on the history of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, see Gregory Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012).
52. Author correspondence, Matt Bryden, February 2020.
53. In April 2015, Mumin appeared in an al-Shabaab video calling for residents of the Golis mountains to wage jihad. He would appear in at least two more al-Shabaab videos in 2015, a second in April chronicling an al-Shabaab attack on African Union forces in Lower Shabelle, Somalia, and another in July 2015 showing an al-Shabaab attack on a Burundian convoy near Leego. Bill Roggio, "US Adds Islamic State Commander in Somalia to List of Global Terrorists," *FDD's Long War Journal*, August 31, 2016, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/08/us-adds-islamic-state-commander-in-somalia-to-list-of-global-terrorists.ph.
54. Atom's relationship with al-Shabaab was always questionable, often charging the group for his services, and thus being more "aligned" with the group than "part" of it. Author correspondence, Christopher Anzalone, January 2020.
55. Author correspondence, Christopher Anzalone, January 2020. According to Christopher Anzalone: "The UN Monitoring Group in its 2013 report (https://www.undocs.org/S/2013/413; see particularly pages

starting at 90) notes that Yassin Khalid Osman ('Yassin Kilwe') was dispatched to Puntland to take control and align Atom's group more squarely within Shabaab in 2010, effectively taking over Atom's group. This was officially announced in February 2012 in an official AS statement that identified Kilwe as the head (emir) of the 'Mujahideen in the Golis Mountains'" and included his *bayah* to Godane and, by extension, to Zawahiri."

56. Author correspondence, Matt Bryden, February 2020.
57. Author correspondence, Christopher Anzalone, January 2020.
58. Author correspondence, Matt Bryden, January 2020.
59. Harun Maruf and Dan Joseph, *Inside al-Shabaab: The Secret History of al-Qaeda's Most Powerful Ally* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018).
60. Author correspondence, Patrick Hubbard, June 2020.
61. Warner and Weiss, "A Legitimate Challenger?," 27, n. b.
62. As Christopher Anzalone notes, "The title of Mumin's *baya* recording, unfortunately, also doesn't reveal much since the word it uses, *thulla*, refers generally to "a party/group (of men)." Author correspondence, Christopher Anzalone, January 2020.
63. Marsai, "Scramble for the Horn of Africa," 5–6. As Matt Bryden has pointed out, however, this relatively small contingent's decision to defect with Mumin was likely as much to do with the clan composition of the Puntland-based cell as it was a reflection of interest in the Islamic State's ideology. Author correspondence, Matt Bryden, January 2020.
64. Author correspondence, Patrick Hubbard, June 2020.
65. Author correspondence, Matt Bryden, January and February 2020.
66. Maruf and Joseph, *Inside al-Shabaab*, 256.
67. Author correspondence, Christopher Anzalone, January 2020.
68. "The Islamic State in West Africa," 11.
69. Ibid.
70. Harun Maruf, "Intelligence Official: Islamic State Growing in Somalia," Voice of America, May 5, 2016, https://www.voanews.com/a/intelligence-official-islamic-state-growing-in-somalia/3316326.html; "The AS Finance System," 20. However, it is widely thought that financial support from IS Central coming through Yemen had stopped by December 2016, just after IS

Somalia was expelled from Qandala. "The Islamic State in East Africa," 20, 47.

71. Ibid., 12.
72. "U.N. Security Council Report," United Nations Security Council, November 2, 2017. 15, #36. For a rich description of the early days of the Islamic State in Somalia, see Maruf and Joseph, *Inside al-Shabaab*, 253–264.
73. Author correspondence, Patrick Hubbard, June 2020.
74. For a brief description of the southern IS–Somalia cell, see Warner and Weiss, "A Legitimate Challenger?," 27.
75. The southern Somalia IS branch was led by Bashir Abu Numan.
76. Christopher Anzalone, "Black Banners in Somalia: The State of al-Shabaab's Territorial Insurgency and the Specter of the Islamic State," *CTC Sentinel* 11, no. 3 (2018), 16, https://ctc.usma.edu/black-banners-somalia-state-al-shabaabs-territorial-insurgency-specter-islamic-state.
77. Maruf, "Intelligence Official: Islamic State Growing in Somalia."
78. For more on Puntland's status within Somalia, see Martha Johnson and Meg Smaker, "State Building in De Facto States: Somaliland and Puntland Compared," *Africa Today* 60, no. 4 (2014): 3–23, doi:10.2979/africatoday.60.4.3.; J. Peter Pham, "State Collapse, Insurgency, and Famine in the Horn of Africa: Legitimacy and the Ongoing Somali Crisis," *Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 2, no. 2 (2011): 153–187, https://doi.org/10.1080/21520844.2011.617238; Mohamed Samantar, *Puntland and Somaliland: Similarities and Differences in the Rebuilding of a Self-governance System from the Ashes* (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 2009); Matt Bryden, "New Hope for Somalia? The Building Block Approach," *Review of African Political Economy* 26, no. 79 (1999): 134–140, https://doi.org/10.1080/03056249908704367.
79. We thank Christopher Anzalone for this point. For more, see "Maritime Piracy," United Nations, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/9.Maritime_piracy.pdf; "Piracy Trails: Tracking the Illicit Financial Flows from Pirate Activities off the Horn of Africa," World Bank, 2013, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTFINANCIALSECTOR/Resources/Pirate_Trails_World_Bank_UNODC_Interpol_report.pdf; Andreas Westberg, "Bloodshed and Breaking Wave: The First Outbreak of

Somali Piracy," *Scientia Militaria* 43, no. 2 (2015), https://scientiamilitaria.journals.ac.za/pub/article/view/1122; "Somali Pirates Captured Iranian Fishing Trawler off Qandala," *Maritime Herald*, May 24, 2017, https://www.maritimeherald.com/2017/somali-pirates-captured-iranian-fishing-trawler-off-qandala/; Robyn Kriel and Briana Duggan, "CNN Exclusive: Somali Pirate Kings Are under Investigation for Helping ISIS and al-Shabaab," CNN, July 10, 2017, https://www.cnn.com/2017/07/10/africa/somali-piracy-attack-spike/index.html.

80. Sir-Righteous, "Puntite Historical Images," Somalispot, April 4, 2017, https://www.somalispot.com/threads/puntite-historical-images.21673/.
81. Harun Maruf, "Somali Officials Vow to Retake Puntland Town," Voice of America, October 28, 2016, https://www.voanews.com/africa/somali-officials-vow-retake-puntland-town.
82. Ibid.
83. What explains the timing and rationale behind the Qandala attack? On the question of timing, many believe that the attack on Qandala, which occurred on October 26, 2016, was intended to coincide with the anniversary of the Islamic State in Somalia's founding, which occurred when Mumin pledged allegiance to IS on October 25, 2015, the year before. Moreover, some like Omar Mohammed have plausibly suggested that the cause for the takeover was based on Mumin's desire to gain full recognition from IS Central, which by holding territory in the vein of the IS Central it was more likely to achieve. Moreover, Qandala was a particularly prime target for a takeover, given its nearness to the ISS base, its historical symbolism, the geographic barriers that prevent it from being reached quickly by security forces, and its proximity to Yemen where ISS allies are known to exist. ("They constantly receive experts or trainers from Yemen, and shipments of weapons and other material. This is why they selected that strategic area," Hussein said.)
84. Harun Maruf, "IS Militants Seize Town in Somalia's Puntland," Voice of America, October 26, 2016, https://www.voanews.com/africa/militants-seize-town-somalias-puntland.
85. Author correspondence, Matt Bryden, January 2020.

86. Feisel Omar and Abdi Sheikh, "Islamic State-Aligned Group Takes Somali Town, Say Officials," Reuters, October 26, 2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-security/islamic-state-aligned-group-takes-somali-town-say-officials-idUSKCN12Q0VW.
87. Ibid.
88. The video is called "Qandala Village in Eastern Somalia after Fighters of the Islamic State Captured It," and is dated October 26, 2016, https://www.dropbox.com/sh/1kn63lch4bfi4pw/AABO-HAwVgH4FSX5jxwCcOKia?dl=0.
89. Marsai, "Scramble for the Horn of Africa," 9.
90. Caleb Weiss, "Islamic State Fighters Withdraw from Captured Somali Port Town," *FDD's Long War Journal*, October 28, 2016.
91. "Qandala Village in Eastern Somalia after Fighters of the Islamic State Captured It" (video), Amaq, October 26, 2016.
92. Author correspondence, anonymous Somali journalist, July 2018.
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid.
95. Harun Maruf, "Forces Retake Somali Town Held by Pro-Islamic State Fighters," Voice of America, December 7, 2016, https://www.voanews.com/a/forces-retake-somali-town-held-by-pro-islamic-state-fighters/3626738.html.
96. Harun Maruf, "Somali Officials Vow to Retake Puntland Town," Voice of America, October 28, 2016, https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-officials-vow-to-retake-puntland-town/3570974.html.
97. "Approximately 22,700 people have been displaced since the non-state armed actors entered Qandala in late October. Cumulatively, 25,700 people have so far been displaced, more than half of the district's 45,300 inhabitants." "OCHA Somalia Flash Update: Humanitarian Impact of Fighting in Qandala, Puntland," ReliefWeb, December 6, 2016, https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/ocha-somalia-flash-update-humanitarian-impact-fighting-qandala-puntland-6-december.
98. Maruf, "IS Militants Seize Town in Somalia's Puntland."
99. Maruf, "Somali Officials Vow to Retake Puntland Town."
100. Author correspondence, anonymous Somali journalist, July 2018; Marsai, "Scramble for the Horn of Africa."
101. Author correspondence, anonymous Somali journalist (R4, "Ali"), July 2018.

102. Author correspondence, anonymous fisherman (R1, "Farah"), November 2018. In addition to promising higher prices for fish, the Islamic State in Somalia did reportedly begin to distribute alms of goodwill to the herders on the outskirts of Qandala. Author correspondence, Matt Bryden, July 2018.
103. Author correspondence, anonymous Somali journalist (R4, "Ali"), July 2018.
104. Author correspondence, anonymous Somali woman (R3, "Hawa"), November 2018.
105. Ibid.
106. Ibid.
107. Ibid.
108. Author correspondence, anonymous fisherman (R1, "Farah"), November 2018.
109. Ibid.; author correspondence, anonymous Somali journalist (R4, "Ali"), July 2018.
110. One suggestion that the Islamic State was responsible for deaths came from an interviewee, who noted that the dead bodies of several elders who had told the Islamic State to leave Qandala were apparently found on the outskirts of the town during its occupation. However, the Islamic State never claimed responsibility for these deaths, even though many locals assumed that they might be responsible. For its part, the Hiraal Institute has suggested IS–Somalia was responsible for some deaths, though it did not disclose specific victims or dates. "The AS Finance System," 16.
111. Author correspondence, anonymous Somali woman (R3, "Hawa"), November 2018.
112. Author correspondence, anonymous fisherman (R1, "Farah"), November 2018.
113. "The Islamic State in East Africa," 16.
114. Author correspondence, anonymous Somali woman (R3, "Hawa"), November 2018.
115. Author correspondence, anonymous fisherman (R1, "Farah"), November 2018.
116. Ibid.
117. "The Islamic State in East Africa," 16.

118. Author correspondence, anonymous fisherman (R1, "Farah"), November 2018.
119. Harun Maruf, "Last Resident Leaves Somali Town Taken by Islamic State," Voice of America, November 25, 2016, https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-town-qandala-puntland-islamic-state/3611903.html.
120. Ibid.
121. "The Islamic State in East Africa," 25.
122. Ibid., 16.
123. Marsai, "Scramble for the Horn of Africa," 10.
124. Harun Maruf, "Somalia Security Forces and IS Fighters Directly Clash for First Time," Voice of America, December 3, 2016, https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-security-forces-and-is-fighters-directly-clash-for-first-time/3621721.html.
125. Maruf, "Somali Officials Vow to Retake Puntland Town."
126. "OCHA Somalia Flash Update: Humanitarian Impact of Fighting in Qandala, Puntland."
127. Maruf, "Forces Retake Somali Town Held by Pro-Islamic State Fighters."
128. "U.N. Security Council Report," United Nations Security Council, November 2, 2017.
129. Marsai, "Scramble for the Horn of Africa," 10.
130. Warner and Weiss, "A Legitimate Challenger?," n. f.
131. "U.N. Security Council Report," United Nations Security Council, November 2, 2017.
132. "Somalia: Puntland Security Forces Recaptured Port Town from ISIS," *Garowe Online*, July 12, 2016, https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/puntland/somalia-puntland-security-forces-recaptured-port-town-from-isis.
133. Maruf, "Forces Retake Somali Town Held by Pro-Islamic State Fighters."
134. "OCHA Somalia Flash Update: Humanitarian Impact of Fighting in Qandala, Puntland, 6 December 2016, Somalia," December 6, 2016, https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/ocha-somalia-flash-update-humanitarian-impact-fighting-qandala-puntland-6-december.
135. Author correspondence, anonymous al-Shabaab defector (R5, "Abdi"), November 2018.

136. Warner and Weiss, "A Legitimate Challenger?," 29; Marsai "Scramble for the Horn of Africa."
137. "U.N. Security Council Report," United Nations Security Council, November 2, 2017, 14.
138. Harun Maruf, "Somali Officials Condemn Attacks, Vow Revenge," Voice of America, June 9, 2017, https://www.voanews.com/africa/somali-officials-condemn-attacks-vow-revenge.
139. Jason Warner and Charlotte Hulme, "The Islamic State in Africa: Estimating Fighter Numbers in Cells across the Continent," *CTC Sentinel* 11, no. 7 (2018), https://ctc.usma.edu/islamic-state-africa-estimating-fighter-numbers-cells-across-continent/.
140. Other clans known to have made their way into the ISS include people of the Oga-den/Darod, Marehan/Darod, Isaq, Rahanweyn, and Gudabirsi/Dir. "The AS Finance System," 14.
141. To that end, anecdotally, one interviewee of the Hiraal Institute in May 2018 estimated that around 70 per cent of ethnic Ali Saleeban supported Mumin and the Islamic State in Somalia, equal numbers doing so out of respect and fear. "The AS Finance System," 14; "U.N. Security Council Report," United Nations Security Council, November 2, 2017, 14.
142. Author correspondence, anonymous fisherman (R1, "Farah"), November 2018.
143. "The Islamic State in East Africa," 14.
144. Ibid., 14.
145. "State Department Designation of Abdiqadir Mumin," US Department of State, August 31, 2016, https://2009–2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/08/261409.htm.
146. Author correspondence, anonymous Al-Shabaab defector (R5, "Abdi"), November 2018.
147. "The Islamic State in East Africa," 17.
148. "U.N. Security Council Report," United Nations Security Council, November 2, 2017, #38. This tendency for the Islamic State to expend resources to bring outside recruits to its areas of operation—treating them well and taking good care of them once inside the caliphate—is a trend that has been seen elsewhere in its other areas of operation. One young Frenchwoman, Kahina el-Hadra, who was recruited by and

joined the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in 2015, writing to her secondary schoolteacher back home, explained: "I'm in Mosul and it's really the top here … I have an apartment that is fully furnished. I pay no rent nor even electricity or water lol. It's the good life!!! I didn't buy so much as a single fork." As cited in Rukmini Callimachi, "The ISIS Files," *New York Times*, April 4, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/04/world/middleeast/isis-documents-mosul-iraq.html.

149. Author correspondence, anonymous Al-Shabaab defector (R5, "Abdi"), November 2018.
150. Ibid.
151. Ibid.
152. "Mumin has operated a makeshift training facility, known as the 'Commander Sheikh Abu Numan Training Camp,' in Puntland. In April 2016, Mumin appeared in a video that depicted just over a dozen fighters training there. The camp is named after Bashir Abu Numan, a former commander who was killed by Shabaab's Amniyat—the rival group's internal security and intelligence branch—after he defected to the Islamic State in late 2015. See *LWJ* report, Islamic State highlights 'first camp of the Caliphate in Somalia.'" Roggio, "US Adds Islamic State Commander in Somalia to List of Global Terrorists."
153. Ibid.
154. As noted in author correspondence, Christopher Anzalone, March 2020.
155. Author correspondence, anonymous Al-Shabaab defector (R5, "Abdi"), November 2018.
156. So too al-Shabaab had conflicting views on the permissibility of soccer. See, for instance, Armin Rosen, "Al-Shabaab's History of Viewing Soccer as a Threat," *Business Insider*, June 16, 2014, https://www.businessinsider.com/al-shabaabs-history-of-viewing-soccer-as-a-threat-2014–6; Hamza Mohamed, "Somalia: Al-Shabab shuts down football pitches in Mogadishu," Al Jazeera, June 7, 2018, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/somalia-al-shabab-shuts-football-pitches-mogadishu-180607045144830.htm.
157. Author correspondence, anonymous Al-Shabaab defector (R5, "Abdi"), November 2018.

158. For more on IS Somalia's weapons, see "The Islamic State in East Africa," 20–21.
159. Ibid., 20. Apart from the lack of a reliable salary for unmarried foot soldiers, ISS salaries are generally commensurate with those offered by al-Shabaab, which range from $30 per month for a foot soldier, plus $30 more per wife and $20 more per child. For more on al-Shabaab's financing, see ibid., 6.
160. Ibid., 4.
161. "U.N. Security Council Report," United Nations Security Council, November 2, 2017, #39.
162. In one extreme and questionable projection, a Kenyan security official suggested that 60 to 80 recruits from Yemen joined Mumin soon after he pledged *bayah*, though this number has not been confirmed. "The AS Finance System," 18; "ISIS Somalia Calls for Terror Attacks during the Holiday Season; Designated Targets Include the Pope, Major Western Cities," Middle East Media Research Institute, December 26, 2017, https://www.memri.org/jttm/isis-somalia-calls-terror-attacks-during-holiday-season-designated-targets-include-pope-major.
163. "U.N. Security Council Report," United Nations Security Council, November 2, 2017, #39.
164. Ibid.
165. Owing to his experience of living in Europe, Mumin is particularly dangerous in terms of foreign recruitment. As one observer has noted: "Because he has preached in British mosques, because he has lived in Britain, his message has a particular resonance with British converts and Islamists." Giannangeli, "British Jihadi Bids to Be Leader of Islamic State."
166. "The Islamic State in East Africa," 18.
167. Indeed, as a 2017 UN report on Somalia noted: "While the threat of ISIL to the Puntland administration is not currently existential, the administration's weak control over Bari region renders it a potential haven for foreign ISIL fighters. An influx of experienced foreign fighters would risk overwhelming Puntland's infrequently paid and demoralized security forces." "Letter Dated 2 November 2017 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to

the President of the Security Council," United Nations, November 2, 2017, 15.

168. Clint Watts, Jacob Shapiro, and Vahid Brown, *Al-Qaeda's (Mis)adventures in the Horn of Africa* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007), iii, https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2010/06/Al-Qaidas-MisAdventures-in-the-Horn-of-Africa.pdf.
169. Interview with Hasan, quoted in Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 261.
170. Harun Maruf, "In Somalia, Businesses Face 'Taxation' by Militants," Voice of America, December 3, 2018, https://www.voanews.com/a/in-somalia-businesses-face-taxation-by-militants/4684759.html.
171. Maruf, "Intelligence Official," 20.
172. Morgan Winsor, "ISIS In Somalia: Islamic State Claims First-Ever Attack in Mogadishu While Courting al-Shabab," *International Business Times*, April 25, 2016, https://www.ibtimes.com/isis-somalia-islamic-state-claims-first-ever-attack-mogadishu-while-courting-al-2359373.
173. Author correspondence, Patrick Hubbard, June 2020.
174. Author correspondence, Caleb Weiss, March 2020.
175. Author correspondence, Patrick Hubbard, June 2020.
176. Author correspondence, Caleb Weiss, March 2020.
177. "The Islamic State in East Africa," 16.
178. AFP, "IS Claims First Suicide Attack in Somalia, Kills 5," *Daily Nation*, May 24, 2017, https://www.nation.co.kehttps://www.nation.co.ke/kenya/news/africa/is-claims-first-suicide-attack-in-somalia-kills-5–401306.
179. "According to Puntland authorities, ISIL leader Abdirahman Fahiye Isse Mohamud (Darod/Harti/Deshishe), also known as Ahmed Adan, Khalid, Yaquub, and Burane, was the primary coordinator of the attack." "U.N. Security Council Report," United Nations Security Council, November 2, 2017, 14.
180. "In Somalia, IS Claims Killing Christians in Bosaso and Policemen in Afgooye," SITE Intelligence Group, 2019, https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/index.php?option=com_acymailing&ctrl=archive&task=view&mailid=13232&ke

y=Tg5iWIIl&subid=1472-t9ir9gm3ghmVr7&tmpl=component&auid=15793.

181. Though 161 is the number that has been tabulated by Caleb Weiss, as Patrick Hubbard has noted, IS in Somalia has occasionally claimed attacks that were later shown not to have occurred as suggested.
182. Author correspondence, Caleb Weiss, March 2020.
183. "Men Who Are True" (video), IS, January 23, 2019.
184. Daniel Milton, *Down, but Not Out: An Updated Examination of the Islamic State's Visual Propaganda* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2018), 13, https://ctc.usma.edu/down-but-not-out-an-updated-examination-of-the-islamic-states-visual-propaganda/.
185. *Hawala* transfers are a system of mostly international money transfers, common especially in Somalia, in which money is not physically transferred, leaving no record, and thus serving as a black market money exchange. For more, see Robert Feldman, "Fund Transfers: African Terrorists Blend Old and New; Hawala and Satellite Telecommunications," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 17, no. 3 (2006), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09592310600672867?scroll=top&needAccess=true&journalCode=fswi20.
186. "U.N. Security Council Report," United Nations Security Council, November 2, 2017.
187. "Twenty-Second Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2368 (2017) Concerning ISIL (Daesh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals and Entities," United Nations, June 27, 2018, 14, http://undocs.org/S/2018/705.
188. Warner and Weiss, "A Legitimate Challenger?"
189. Author correspondence, anonymous observer, April 2019.
190. Kim Hjelmgaard, "Islamic State-Affiliated Fighters in Somalia Release First Official Video," *USA Today*, December 26, 2017, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/12/26/islamic-state-affiliated-fighters-somalia-release-first-official-video/981105001/.
191. Ibid.
192. "ISIS Somalia Calls for Terror Attacks during the Holiday Season."
193. The video "Hunt Them, O Monotheists," also took aim, through featured IS–Somalia fighters, at those in East Africa who had not

pledged *bayah* to IS and those who "refrain from jihad" (*al-qa'ideen 'an al-jihad*). See also Quran 4: 95.

194. Christopher Anzalone (@IbnSiqilli), "In its latest weekly newsletter, IS Central media cannot decide if Somalia is a 'wilaya(t)' or not + a 'not' (image 4) from issue #139," Twitter, July 28, 2018, https://twitter.com/IbnSiqilli/status/1023314374386229248?s=19.
195. "The Islamic State in East Africa," 26.
196. Anzalone, "Black Banners in Somalia," 16.
197. Milton, *Down, but Not Out*, 16.
198. The Hiraal Institute even suggested that some level of cooperation existed between the two groups' intelligence wings near ISS's core territories in northern Somalia, while others have said that high-level meetings between representatives of both groups took place in 2018. "The AS Finance System," 9, 17.
199. Ibid., 25.
200. Author correspondence, Caleb Weiss, March 2020.
201. Even so, al-Shabaab, at least for a time, still felt strong enough in southern Somalia to begin releasing all foreign fighters that had been arrested by its internal security and intelligence wing, the Amniyat, on suspicion of having sympathies or even being members of ISS. Releasing them on the condition that they forgo any leadership role within ISS, al-Shabaab allowed those released to live with their families in al-Shabaab-controlled areas, as a pragmatic move to "quiet … disaffection among foreign members … and free up space in [al-Shabaab's] prisons." "The AS Finance System," 9, 17; author correspondence, Robyn Kriel, August 2018.
202. Thomas Joscelyn, "Shabaab Executes Alleged Spies in Southern Somalia," *FDD's Long War Journal*, October 11, 2018, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/10/shabaab-executes-alleged-spies-in-southern-somalia.php.
203. Thomas Joscelyn and Caleb Weiss, "Islamic State Warns Shabaab of Impending Battle in Somalia," *FDD's Long War Journal*, November 16, 2018, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/11/islamic-state-warns-shabaab-of-impending-battle-in-somalia.php.
204. Weiss, "Reigniting the Rivalry."
205. Ibid.

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207. Weiss, "Reigniting the Rivalry."
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11. CONCLUSION

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